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BY

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THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

(*Continued*).

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1 Samuel xviii. 12-30.

"And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul" (v. 12).

DAVID'S JEOPARDY.

SAUL was afraid of David. This is most remarkable, for was not Saul the king, and David but the servant? Why then should a king be afraid of a harper? The king had the resources of the nation at his command. In a moment he could have surrounded David by an overpowering force; yet, notwithstanding these advantages, Saul was afraid of the young musician. There must be some explanation of this remarkable fear. What is it? It is the mystery of spiritual character, and that in very deed is the explanation of all the deadliest fear which paralyses the spirit of tyranny and oppression. There was something about David which Saul could not comprehend. Not his physical power, not his social descent, not his musical genius,—there was again and again a look in the young face which haunted the king like a ghostly revelation. That face beamed with wisdom, darkened with unexplained apprehensions, and was lifted into dignity as if by a spirit of judgment. That young face haunted the king, followed him into his slumbers, reproved him in the midst of his vices, set up before him the image and aspect of an immeasurable kingdom. It is in this direction that we should look for the greatest and best influences of society. What are weapons of war, or mere strength of arms, or largeness of wealth, or the whole pomp and circumstance of monarchy? When the

wise man ceases out of the land the power of the land is dead; schools, churches, institutions devoted to the culture of knowledge and the promotion of wisdom, these are the strongest bulwarks and defences of any nation. Hence the peculiar dignity and authority of the highest moral teaching. Righteousness not only exalteth a nation in certain moral senses, but it throws upon the observing enemy all the force of a spiritual fear, because, in striking at such a nation he feels that he is striking at the supreme power and sensitiveness of the universe. As Judas was afraid of Christ in the garden, and fell back to the ground when he saw the embodied holiness of the Son of God, so every king evilly disposed like Saul, or every ruffian band, or murderer like Iscariot, will fall back in fear from the truly righteous and noble character. David exerted no conscious influence; it was no purpose of his to affright King Saul; he attended to his daily business, cultivated communion with God, walked in the ways of goodness, and his quietly and simply doing these things invested him with that weird power before which the kingly heart quailed.

"Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him" (vv. 12-15).

A new idea appears to have occurred to Saul, and one which would seem to be inspired by magnanimity. Saul now takes the course up, according to David military promotion. The object was to get David out of the way by sending him to some distant part of the kingdom on any pretence that might arise. The method is a common one to-day. No matter what honour is given to an enemy if the honour only take him away from sight, and break up his immediate local influence. Men should look into the motives of their honours, for possibly in that motive they may discover reason for humility rather than boasting. A humiliating sight it is to observe a man making an investment of his magnanimity and earning credit for being generous, when in his heart he is inexpressibly mean. As with honours so with gifts, for not seldom are they also oblations to self rather than tributes to the receiver. Study the object of Saul, and then see

how his acts fell into relation to it: if we miss the object we cannot but misunderstand the policy; Saul's object was to get rid of David by any means; attempted murder having failed, flattery and promotion were dragged into service. To what extremes are men driven by corrupt motives! The first effort of malice leads in a murderous direction; that is the natural and proper course for malice to take if consistent with itself; but even malice can suspend its fury to play the tricks of generosity. Can a man be really malicious when he offers his supposed enemy a captaincy in his army? This would seem to be impossible, yet it is the plainest prose of every-day life. People who do not search into reason and motive would instantly be led away by the kingly nobleness of conferring honour upon David. Knowing this to be the case it should be our solemn business to interrogate ourselves as to the motives by which our conduct is actuated. Is there a single action in life which will bear analysis as to its moral elements in the sight of God? At this period of the world's history it is more and worse than ignorance to pretend that an action has to be judged by its social aspects. Life is profoundly metaphysical. To shrink from inquiring into motive is to trifle with life; yet, to inquire truly into motive is often to shatter the fairest appearances. "How should man be just with God?" "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" These inquiries may seem to enshroud life in distressing melancholy, yet they are not the less the inquiries which will bring life into a tone of reality and establish it in a position of complete responsibility.

David continued in his undisturbed course of wise consideration and noble prudence. There was no stoop of servility in his attitude towards the king, yet there was neither aspect nor tone of defiance. David simply took the task that was assigned to him, and wrought out its detail with wisdom and care. This is the way to treat every enemy. Instead of directly attacking hostility and so creating partisanship on its behalf, it is infinitely wiser to go about the daily task with simple faith and obvious wisdom, as if content to serve in the lowliest or highest capacity. Patience by long continuance constitutes itself into a solid argument. David shows us how possible it is for a man to be justified

by his deeds rather than to be vindicated by the eloquence of mere words. No hint is given that David ever replied to Saul, charging him with injustice or any form of evil-mindedness. The silence of David is not the least remarkable characteristic of this whole incident. What defence can really be made in words? It is possible to all men,—men of the slowest speech and least aptitude in controversy, to answer malignant criticism by a useful life. Nor did David commit himself with any of the courtiers around him. He saw much, but said nothing. He observed men with quiet penetration, and bore himself in relation to them with frankness and dignity. Even our enemies must sooner or later discover our wisdom and earnestness. They who are most keenly alive to the necessity of finding faults in our spirit and conduct must in the long run take knowledge of the general wisdom and rectitude of a well intended life. Let no man suppose that because he is not placed in the romantic circumstances which surrounded David, that therefore he is unobserved and unpursued by criticism or ill-will. The criticism comes up in various ways, and is applied according to the capacity and conditions of the individual life, and the one thing to be remembered is that the profound and unanswerable reply to criticism is a simple, true, faithful, and beneficent course of action. In the long run, this is always crowned with honour. When the enemy has nothing to quote but deeds, and when those deeds are all of a useful kind, the quotation must finally tell in favour of the man who in silence has erected a fabric of useful service.

The religious explanation given in the case of David is marked by beautiful naturalness. Wherever there is true wisdom there is always the presence of the Lord to account for it. "The Lord was with him," is not an expression limited to any one set of circumstances or one class of favoured men. The Lord will be with the least of us, and direct the way of the humblest of his creatures. Take nothing with your own hands as if by your own strength and skill you could accomplish your purpose: in all thy ways acknowledge God and he will direct thy path. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." Observe that Saul's eye was still upon David, and that when he saw that David behaved

himself wisely he was afraid of him. Could Saul have seen one mistake! Had David but committed himself in one rash utterance! We know what consequences would have followed from the least error on David's part; the sword would have fallen upon him in a moment, and no cry of his could have touched the heart of Saul's revenge. But David gave Saul no such opportunity. Mark here, the dignity and the utility of self-control. It is hard, no doubt, to live under the eye of malignant criticism, but there is no help for it in this world. The Christian life is lived under daily criticism, and when the enemy can discover any lapse or flaw in Christian conduct, how triumphant is the cry of malevolence! Hard, no doubt, awfully hard, and harder for some men than for others, and indeed utterly impossible but for the daily ministry of grace. Yet what is all this but an aspect of necessary discipline? We follow One who was subjected to the same cruel observation, yet who was without sin. That gracious and mighty Christ will be our defence in the day of danger, and help us to pass through every criticism without the smell of fire being found upon us. "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." "Still all my cry shall be, Nearer, my God, to thee." Let all young men in critical circumstances, all older men in higher positions, all men clothed with supreme responsibilities take heed that the eye of society see nothing in them by the grace of God, but wisdom of purpose and action. But are we always to be considering that the eye of society is upon us, and is life to be a daily reply to social criticism? Certainly not, in any sense that involves selfish calculation. The great thing to be remembered is, "Thou God seest me," and under that solemn conviction all the rest will follow in constant and happy sequence.

Saul being foiled in this direction betook himself to another course of conduct towards David. Saul proposed to further honour the young courtier by making him his son-in-law. In a tone of feigned cheerfulness the king said, "Only be valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles." How the divine name has been dragged into unworthy and unholy uses! What is this but the most corrupt of all hypocrisy? For Saul said, "Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him." So far, therefore, David's good conduct has gone for

almost nothing in the way of appeasing the king's ill-feeling. We are told that if men will be wise and good and useful they are sure to be popular in society. It would not be difficult to establish the contrary proposition upon a strong historical basis. When the worst human passions are aroused holy character and lofty purpose go for nothing. Let the life of Jesus Christ be the one complete answer to the discouraging suggestion that if we ourselves were good, society would adopt a just policy towards us. See in Saul the true quality of malice: there is nothing too mean for it to do; there is no course too tortuous for it to adopt; lies, hypocrisy, cruelty, these are the weapons with which it will fight its way to its destiny.

How Saul uncrowns himself in the twenty-second verse!

"And Saul commanded his servants, saying, Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now, therefore, be the king's son-in-law."

When Saul made that speech he took off the crown and became a mean man. How deceitful is the action of iniquity in the heart when it will lead men to abase themselves thus in the estimation of their servants! It did not occur to Saul that when he trusted his servants with this commission he destroyed their confidence and respect in relation to himself. There might be no outward show of such distinction, but it was not the less a fact in the heart of those who received the king's wicked instructions. But sin is self-blinding. Again and again we have seen that the sinner is not only a criminal but a fool. Saul wished to touch the vanity of David, and through his vanity to accomplish his overthrow. This is the very policy of the devil: it was indeed the course which the devil pursued when he tempted the Son of God in the wilderness. Saul told David through his servants that he desired not any dowry, but a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies (v. 25). David's young heart was well pleased at the thought of being the king's son-in-law; still not a word more did he say than was rendered necessary by courtesy. Perhaps now he is in greater danger than ever and in a sense this may be the beginning of his downfall; but who can tell all the issues of any one action? Up to this moment David's strongest points only have been assailed: what if

1 Samuel xxi. 9.

"And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod: if thou wilt take that, take it: for there is none other save that here. And David said, There is none like that; give it me."

TRIED WEAPONS.

THE world is old enough now to have laid by in store weapons upon whose quality and strength it can pronounce with the emphasis of experience. What occasion is there for us to try newfangled instruments of fantastic shape and unproven temper? Is there an old steel? Are there no historical swords? Are we left altogether without the spell of rousing memories? Are there yet amongst us swords whose touch is an inspiration, because they connect us with the heroisms and victories of other days? It appears from the context that David was flying from the face of Saul, that he came in his course to Nob to Ahimelech the priest, and made a statement of his case more or less correct. At the conclusion of the interview, David told the priest that he had no sword, and asked him for his assistance under these destitute circumstances. "And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if thou wilt take that, take it: for there is none other save that here." All the weapons of the enemy will one day fall into the hands of the Church, and great will be the slaughter in the name of the Lord. Goliath never dreamt of the destiny of his sword. It was Philistinian property, intended for Philistinian purposes, and lo! it was wrenched from his hand, and reddened with his own blood. It is so with all evil. It is always preparing a weapon for its own destruction, and twisting a rope for its own neck.

What a companion and friend would this sword be to David!

How it would link him with events gone far away! How he would speak in pathetic soliloquy as he looked upon that sword! Would not old stains come upon it and say to him, "All that do wrong shall be put down, and every foul tyranny shall be slain and hidden in the dust, where no man can find it any more"? Would he not think of the call of Samuel, and of the anointing oil, and of the secret with which he had been entrusted; and as he regarded the sword that was in his hand, would not his soul feel the inspiration of a new impulse, would not his lips be opened in a new and tender prayer at the throne of the heavenly grace? It is even so with ourselves. We have old books in our libraries the very touch of which makes us young again; we have passages marked in books the very marking of which causes us to forget the years that have taken away aught of our strength, and rouses us to do, with the old prowess, the old and beautiful deeds. Blessed are they who are rich in memories, who can commune with old milestones on the road, and old stiles where they have lingered, and old trysting-places, and yellow old memories that have the keeping of life within their grasp. Are we living so as to lay up such memories? Or is our life just a superficial scramble, leaving behind us no footprints, no wayside marks, and never enriching our hearts with one recollection that can destroy time and make us young, as if we could draw upon eternity?

How ignoble a thing for Goliath to have been slain with his own sword! To have the weapon wrenched out of one's own hand, and thrust into one's own heart! Well might the eagle, on the poet's page, be made to mourn that out of its own breast had been taken the feather which caused the arrow to fly with a deadlier speed to drink the blood of its heart! It is always so. Whoever is doing wrong will be slain with his own sword; whoever is building upon false foundations will be "hoist with his own petard." You know the case of the minister who, speaking to his friends, in tones too solemn to be other than artificial and untrue, said to them, "Do not read Shakespeare; it is a waste of time to read the pages of such a writer; read other and better literature; else what an account will you be called upon to give when you go to that 'undiscovered country

from whose bourn no traveller returns'!" Goliath slain with his own sword; and the minister quoting in the pulpit the very author against whose writings he was cautioning the young geniuses that waited upon his ministry!

We propose to treat this text with special reference to the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and to contend that in all the conflicts of life there is none like it for routing the foe and adding victories to truth. "The word of the Lord is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The Bible is a complete armoury, as we may read in the sixth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. We in these latter days have seen some curious specimens of cutlery. We have seen the boy with that wonderful thing in his hand of which he is so proud. He says, "That is the great blade for cutting wood and leather and hard substances; and this is a little blade for making pens and cutting pencils; and this is a lancet blade, and this is a bodkin, and this is a piercer of another kind, and this is a screw." And so he turns them all out under one haft. It is even so with this better haft. We can turn all sorts of blades out of it in every possible direction, and hold it up like a complete armoury. We now propose to do so, and to ask whether in all the equipments of life there is aught to be compared to the sword of the Lord.

There is none like it for variety of adaptation. We find in the word of God weapons that we can turn in every direction; weapons that suit every mood, and every combination of circumstances by which we are surrounded. We need not go out of the book for a single answer. Whatsoever may be the peculiar gift of mind or tongue, we find in the word of God—without consulting any other author—the precise answer to every difficulty, the right method of meeting every opposition, and the one true solace that can get into the heart and heal it with the succour which it needs. Sometimes it is needful to meet spiritual and

intellectual opposition by the blade of irony. Behold, we have a blade in this book; for did not Elijah taunt the priests and worshippers of Baal, saying, "Cry aloud, for he is a god"? And may we not, following his example, mock, in many cases, those who with impotent rage are seeking to summon another god than the Jehovah of the universe to take the supreme seat in creation? Yet there are some people who do not understand what irony is.

As for argument, where can we find a blade more keenly argumentative? In the Holy Scriptures we have specimens of the keenest, most lucid and persistent reasoning that can be found within the bounds of all literature. And as for casuistry, cases of conscience which cannot be settled, the sword of the Lord is quick and powerful, piercing to the dividing asunder, getting into the most critical parts of our life, searching out the intents and purposes of the soul: not dealing with broad, general statements only, but dealing with the most subtle, recondite, difficult conditions and experiences of the heart. No man need have any difficulty in piercing any casuistical question to its very marrow, if he will only avail himself of the services of the sword of the Spirit. Then, if aught might be needed to ward off those who would give sorrow to the soul, enemies that would plague the heart with much difficulty, infuse into our troubled life much grief, there is no blade that can reach so far, and strike so keenly, and defend so completely, as the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

I would impress all young readers with the comprehensiveness of the Bible, with its universality of adaptation to all the circumstances and necessities of human life. We may be accused of boldness for making this statement, yet we assert it; for we fear a good many young people and others are going elsewhere for defence, instead of going into the sanctuary of the Lord, where the weapons of Heaven are provided in rich and exquisite profusion. Many men are going to hard books, to elaborate treatises, to severe arguments, conducted by uninspired genius, in the expectation of finding there the answer to some particular difficulty. Men are inquiring again and again, "What books can be recommended to meet certain classes of objections?" We

recommend the word of God as the best answer to every objection that can be brought against it. Let the word of the Lord be the defence of the Lord. Let the Lord's own word be the answer to the suggestion of every devil and the seductiveness of every tempter. We find in the Book of God all we need, and we recommend those who are going elsewhere for weapons with which to fight the battles of life to turn back to the old armour set in order by the hand of the Living One himself.

There is none like it for ease of carriage. There are weapons that are very difficult to carry, but the sword of the Lord is not one of them. There are weapons of war very intricately constructed and very difficult of management, very cumbrous, and altogether oppressive; but the sword of the Lord does not belong to that class. Consider how little a book the Bible is, and regard that circumstance as one of the finest proofs of its presumptive inspiration and adaptation to the wants of man. Given the "Encyclopædia Britannica" as a work of inspiration for the guidance of men—and who could have read it? Who could have got through its mile on mile of lettered stationery? Who could have comprehended its genius and its scope? Instead of the word of God being the largest book in the library, it is, in some respects, the smallest. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed;" "The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal." The word of the Lord is short as to extent, is compassable as to magnitude. Yet who can exhaust it? It is like some of our own monosyllables, pronounceable by the infantile tongue, inexhaustible by the most stupendous intellect. Take one word of the kind which is signified: the word love. A little child can say the word love, but is there an angel in heaven that has touched the shore of that sea? You can carry the word of the Lord in one hand; you can carry it in your smallest pocket, you can read it through from end to end, and keep the memory and all the intellectual and spiritual faculties in concentrated attention while you pass through the exercise. Have you ever tried this? Are we not in danger of snapping off little pieces of the sword and mistaking them for the whole weapon: of taking the mere filings of the steel, and complaining that the sword is without

strength or edge? Take it as a whole; abide by it in its entirety; strike with the whole force of it. It is possible to do this, not in the letter, but in the spirit; and when a man wields the whole weapon, he never strikes but to kill the foe; he never puts out his hand but in omnipotent and complete defence.

There is none like it for universality of use. Children and sick persons can use it; the poorest man can avail himself of it; the busiest man may find a moment for its exercise. Are we wrong in mourning the disposition to take away the sword of the Spirit from the use of children? We should never exclude, directly or indirectly, by the law of the land, the Bible from the common schools of Britain. We would exclude the priest and the minister, and the dogmatic teacher, and the sectarian zealot, but never would we consent to have the Bible excluded. Let the Bible be there. Thomas Guthrie tells us that as soon as the children could put letters and syllables together in the elementary schools in Scotland they were turned into the Book of Proverbs; and he traces a great deal of the sagacity and strength of the Scottish character to this early training in that richest of all ethical and philosophical books. Says he, "Think of a child being put down to read such sentences as 'Tom has a dog,' 'The cat is here,' when he might be reading such words as 'God is love.' 'Train up a child in the way he should go'!" Do not take the Bible away from children, but do not make it a task-book. Do not gather around the memories of childhood any evil recollections regarding your severity in compelling them to commit to memory the sacred word. Make it the joy and privilege of their lives; show them how it is the richest of luxuries to be able to know what God has said, and to be able to quote God's wishes in God's own words.

The sick can use this sword of the Lord. It can be wielded in sighs, in broken expressions; it can be hinted at; it can be whispered; the weakest, frailest creature, just trembling on the edge of the grave, can use the sword of the Lord. And the poor man has a weapon which he can use. He is not learned; he cannot speak the language of many who assail his Christian faith; but let him speak a word from the heart, stead-

fastly and reverently, and in the long run he will slay Goliath with his own weapon, and be more than conqueror through him in whose word his heart has believed.

What sword must we have? It must be the sword of the Lord. There is none like that. It is one, it is simple, it is complete, it is sufficient; it has the testimony of ages written upon it. Who, then, says that he will take the sword of the Lord and fight the battles of life with that? Could the dead bear witness, in countless thousands they would say, with all the emphasis of infinitely varied experience, "There is none like it!" And they have tested many; they know one sword from another, the true steel from the false lead; and all history says in our hearing this day, "If you want a sword that can do execution, that has inspiration in its very touch, victory in its very steel, take the sword of the Lord, for there is none like it."

We have need of it. We have not the answer in ourselves; it is put into us by the breath of the Spirit of the Lord. Life is a war, a fierce and terrible fight. Some of us seem to have no rest night or day; we are besieged by the enemy; we are well-nigh overwhelmed by the foe. What is our defence? The sword of the living God. Let us take the sword of the Lord and of Gideon—it smiteth down a host like one man, and cleaveth the bones of the mighty like straw; the helmet of brass is as a covering of ivy before it, and the breastplate of iron as a flimsy gauze. Oh, dear, dear sword! The grand old veterans of other days have passed it on to us, and we, with added victories, ought to hand it on to generations yet to come. Every day the Bible seems to be newer, deeper, richer, mightier than ever it did before. It is the sum of all literature, the consummation of all genius, a repository of consolation, a solace of healing and redemption for all the ills and woes and griefs of this poor life. Blessed are they who have hidden this word in their innermost hearts.

1 Samuel xxii.

1. David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam [in the great valley of Elah which forms the highway from Philistia to Hebron]: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him.

2. And every one that was in distress [persecuted by Saul and his house], and every one that was in debt [notwithstanding such passages as Exod. xxii. 25; Lev. xxv. 36; Deut. xxiii. 19], and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them [for they were not an undisciplined band]: and there were with him about four hundred men.

3. ¶ And David went thence to Mizpeh [mentioned nowhere else] of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab [David was descended from Ruth the Moabitess], Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God [Elohim, not Jehovah] will do for me.

4. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold.

5. ¶ And the prophet Gad [probably a fellow-student of David's in the Naioth of Samuel by Ramah] said unto David, Abide not in the hold [in the land of Moab]; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest [city] of Hareth.

6. ¶ When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeah [his own royal city] under a [tamarisk] tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him;)

7. Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites [Saul suspects even the chosen men of his own tribe]; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds;

8. That all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me ["It may be there were some of them that were sorry for his malice and madness against innocent David, but durst not show it, lest Saul should have used them, as afterwards Cambyses, king of Persia, did some of his servants, whom in his rage he commanded to kill Crœsus, who was left as a counsellor to him by his father Cyrus, and had now by reproving him for his cruelty, fallen under his displeasure. His servants thinking that he would afterwards repent it, hid Crœsus, and slew him not; and when Cambyses shortly after wanted Crœsus for his faithful counsel, and wished for him again, his servants expecting a great reward, brought him forth. Cambyses was glad that Crœsus was alive: but yet he put his servants to death, for sparing him contrary to his command."],

or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?

9. ¶ Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over [who stood with] the servants [mules ?] of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub.

10. And he enquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.

11. Then the king [probably with a view to a wholesale massacre] sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob: and they came all of them to the king.

12. And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my lord.

13. And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast enquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?

14. Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son in law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?

15. Did I then begin to enquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more.

16. And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house.

17. ¶ And the king said unto the footmen [runners] that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord.

18. And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and [with the assistance of his servants] he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod [clothed officially in honour of the king].

19. And Nob [whose only offence was that Ahimelech the priest had shewn kindness to David], the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.

20. ¶ And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David.

21. And Abiathar [the one priest who had escaped the general massacre] shewed David that Saul had slain the Lord's priests.

22. And David said unto Abiathar, I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul: I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house.

23. Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.

1 Samuel xxii.

DAVID AN OUTLAW.

REMEMBERING that David was specially called to high honour, it is curious and instructive to notice through what distressing processes he is obliged to pass. All our ideas of a divine vocation are upset by this process. Foremost amongst those ideas would have been the assurance that a man called of heaven would have before his feet a smooth and sunny road, and that every day would witness to the concurrence of nature and society in the sacred appointment. Had a man rushed upon this destiny, we should not have been surprised if his audacity had been punished in the most exemplary manner. Where, then, is the law of just recognition and retribution? Here we have a man divinely called to the highest position, yet he is chastised with whips and scorpions night and day; on the other hand, we have a man who rushes in a spirit of usurpation into lofty dignities, and he also is punished in like manner. Who can say which is the divinely elected and which the self-elected man? Not only so; sometimes the usurper seems to carry everything his own way and to be aided in his riotous progress by legions of angels, whilst the man who is known to have been divinely called is baffled and perplexed at every turn. All these circumstances show that the judgment does not lie within narrow limits, and certainly does not lie within the immediate day. Large breadths of time are essential to a correct criticism of the providence of God. The whole circle of the divine purpose must be completed before men can pronounce upon it any solid and rational opinion. We are now, then, in the midst of a most harrowing and vexatious process, and can only patiently work our way through it, and steadfastly believe that in the end God will vindicate his own methods of education.

The great valley of Elah is notable for the number of its natural caves, some of such great extent that Dean Stanley has characterised one of them as "a subterranean palace, with vast columnar halls and arched chambers." It is supposed that the name Adullam was given to the largest of the caverns on account of its nearness to the old royal Canaanitish city of Adullam, referred to in Joshua xv. 35. A curious picture is presented by the gathering in the cave of Adullam: "And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented [bitter of soul], gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men" (v. 2). It is not to be supposed that all these persons were incapable outlaws, without knowledge of military operations and without any claim to personal integrity. In many instances they simply represented the gloominess and hopelessness of the age in which they lived. The kingdom had gone down under the administration of Saul, and everything being out of course, the people who under other circumstances would have been socially foremost were thrown into poverty and driven into momentary despair. Under such circumstances men are only too thankful to constitute themselves into a band under able captaincy; and David was in all respects pre-eminently the man to lead and inspire a host which had been demoralised and dispirited. But this picture certainly contributes a feature of interest to the story, which is of a most painful kind. Surrounded by such a discontented band, who could suppose that David was the chosen instrument of Heaven? His very followers appeared to discredit his divine vocation. On the other hand, even an arrangement of this kind is in strict accord with the great line of providence which has in many an instance passed by the proud, the noble, the strong, and the wealthy, and brought into irregular but successful service elements and forces which society had regarded as outcast or unavailable. There is no straining of the meaning in discovering in all this picture a type of the position of Jesus Christ in the world. He was despised and rejected of men; he had not where to lay his head; and the people who immediately surrounded him were characterised by unaccountable expectations, personal inferiority, social degradation, and also by need of every description: surely it was no

valiant or brilliant host that gathered around the Son of God whilst he tenanted this Adullam cave which we call the earth; but we must await the completed issue before we pronounce upon the improbabilities, and even incredibilities, of the position and claims sustained by Jesus Christ.

"And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold" (vv. 3, 4).

In these verses it is beautiful to observe that amidst all the tumult and distress of the times the filial spirit of David was unquenched. Having left the cave of Adullam, David came to Mizpeh of Moab, a place which is not mentioned elsewhere in the Scriptures. "Mizpeh" means a watch-tower, and was probably some mountain fortress in Moab. David was not without kindred in Moab; as we have already seen, Jesse his father was the grandson of Ruth the Moabitess, and the distance from the south of Judah, where the band was wandering, was inconsiderable. Thus are the threads of life intermingled one with another, and thus do coincidences establish themselves in unlooked-for places. "Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." David would not proceed further until he had assured himself of the divine purpose. He would first see what God would do for him. It is instructive to remember that when David addressed the Moabite king he spoke of God—that is, Elohim,—and not of Jehovah. The Moabites were idolaters, and they had nothing to do with the awful name by which the Most High was known to his covenant people. Jehovah is a word which no Gentile can ever properly pronounce. It was peculiarly the music of the Hebrew believer. But although the particular name, as originally uttered, has passed away from the earth, we have a Name that is above every name, which may be pronounced and loved by the mightiest and the weakest, the great angel and the little child. This unquenchable filial piety is not an indication of weakness, but a proof of strength, on the part of David. Do we strain words to unnatural meanings when we see in this filial care a type of the love which burned in the heart of Jesus Christ

when on the cross he commended his mother to the disciple whom he loved? Whilst it is unwarrantable to force ancient instances into purely Christian relations, it is quite as unwarrantable to consider that in the matter of providence God had no thought of what was yet to take place in the world. Providence is a kind of parable of the Gospel. Blessed are they who have eyes to see its beauty and follow the outgoing of all its meaning.

In the fifth verse a man arises who from this point occupies a considerable space in the history of David. Gad is mentioned as the king's seer in 2 Samuel xxiv. 11; in 1 Chronicles xxix. 29 he reappears as a narrator; and in 2 Chronicles xxix. 25 he is mentioned, with his brother Nathan, as the man who had drawn up the plan of the great temple services. It has been remarked that it was Gad who in the golden days of the kingdom dared to reprove the mighty king for his deed of numbering the people. It is supposed that he had been a fellow-student and friend of David's in the Naioth of Samuel by Ramah. The conjecture which sees in Gad a messenger from the old prophet Samuel to his beloved pupil David, the anointed of the Lord, is supported by strong evidence. Gad now becomes the adviser of the greatest man in Hebrew history. Wonderful is the distribution of talent in the kingdom of God! Kings need advisers. The mightiest soldiers can do nothing without their rank and file. It is good that the highest man in society should have to turn aside to ask the advice of one who has no wealth but wisdom, the chiefest wealth of all. It is well also that wise men, who might be inclined to abstract study, even to lose themselves in metaphysical inquiries, should be called upon to consider practical problems and to give counsel in seasons of danger and panic. Thus does the hand that balances all things bring into relation men who are the counterparts of each other, and who indeed are necessary to each other, and thus is society held together like a boundless constellation, no star falling out of its place and no collision occurring amid all the mighty rush of incalculable forces.

Now we turn from David to Saul, who was in his royal city of Gibeah, and heard there respecting the movements of his supposed enemy. Abiding under a tamarisk tree on the height

with a spear in his hand, Saul addressed the servants that stood about him. Saul's love of trees was a remarkable feature in his character; there is something, therefore, harmonious in his holding this council under the spreading tamarisk branches. All the men who are round about him belong to his own tribe of Benjamin with one exception, the exception being his wicked counsellor the Edomite Doeg. This council is noticeable as one of the earliest of which there is any definite account in the history of the whole world. Saul has resolved on murder. Saul accuses his own *fideles* of conspiracy against him; he complains that his own son had made a league with the son of Jesse; and his greatest complaint of all is that not one man in all his band was sorry for him. These were sad words as uttered by King Saul; the evil spirit was then working mightily within his diseased mind; the words are full of tragedy and pathos. If Saul could have seen a tear in the eyes of his followers, it would have encouraged him, as showing that sympathy was still alive on his behalf. But every eye was tearless; in no face was there a trace of sorrow; in no voice was there a tone of condolence.

Truly a most vivid and impressive picture is that of the great king standing under the tamarisk tree complaining bitterly that no one had told him of the machinations of Jonathan and David. In that sad hour Doeg the Edomite came to the aid of the king, a man upon whom we need not spare more time than to remark that he became the instrument of Saul's wrath in turning upon the priests and slaying in one day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. The execration of ancient Jewish history followed the Edomite, and Jewish imagination was even strained to depict the horrible destiny to which that evil man was driven: we read that Doeg the Edomite was encountered by three destructive demons, one of whom deprived him of his learning, a second burned his soul, and a third scattered his dust in the synagogues. When the story was related by Abiathar, who alone escaped to David, David said, "I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul; I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house." David was a discerner of spirits. He knew that Doeg could never be associated with any noble thought or

generous deed. There are men who carry their spirit in their countenances and whose every action shows how mean are their purposes. A sad thing indeed, and lamentable almost beyond all others, that the very spirit of fate seems to have decreed that some names can never be associated with justice, beauty, or generosity. There are men who have done unwisely and even wickedly in whose character there have been redeeming features of great attractiveness, but in the whole build and character of Doeg the Edomite there is not one line which honest men can admire, or one aspect which can fascinate an honourable mind.

Thus the troubles of David were increased by incidental occurrences in which he was not immediately concerned. Not only on the broad line distinctively his own, but in a hundred collateral lines, dangers thickened upon David, and accumulated into an evidence which, judged in a purely earthly light, would show that he must rather be opposing the will of Heaven than carrying out its high and sacred purpose. Is our way blocked up in this manner? Are we hunted and persecuted whilst we are endeavouring to carry out the designs of Providence? Are we in utter perplexity as to the sorrows which befall us, and the difficulties which are heaped upon all who take part and lot with us? Have we not only our own troubles to bear, but the troubles of which we are the indirect cause or occasion in others? Under such circumstances we can but go back into the venerable sanctuary of history, and learn there something of the astounding methods of divine discipline and culture, and consider whether even in the midst of tumult, danger, and anguish, we may not be steadfastly pursuing the upward way which will end in heaven and in rest.

1 Samuel xxiii.

STILL PROTECTED.

GAD is still accompanying the fugitive David and assisting him in the interpretation of the divine will. When David is said, in the second verse, to have inquired of the Lord whether he should go and smite the Philistines, the inquiry was made through the prophet. That such inquiries were made through prophets is proved by the narrative given in 1 Kings xxii. When the Urim and Thummim were not available it was lawful to consult the prophet instead of the priest. The lesson to ourselves is that religious instrumentalities are to be adopted according to our opportunities. Men cannot always go up into the public sanctuary to offer worship to God; but for that reason they need not be silent or irreverent. On many occasions usual opportunities are foreclosed, as when men are travelling, or in sickness, or in circumstances of distress, but under such conditions access to the divine throne is as open and free as ever. Herein is the glorious liberty of the Gospel of Christ; wherever we are, we can address the divine majesty and come boldly to the throne of mercy to obtain grace to help in time of need. On the second occasion David had an opportunity of consulting God through the medium of the ephod. Abiathar the priest, with the ephod, had arrived. In the ephod were set twelve precious stones, one for each of the twelve tribes. The names of the tribes were engraved on these gems, together with other sacred words. According to high authority, the common belief was that the ephod stones gave their answer to the royal and high-priestly questions by some peculiar shining. Upon these matters we can, of course, have no certain information, but there remains the moral and permanent lesson that David never took any important step in life without endeavouring to discover the divine will. That is the point upon which our attention has to be fixed. Whilst we are wasting our time

in propounding unanswerable questions, we may be depriving the soul of vivid personal communion with God. If there is one Christian doctrine clearer than another, it is that every man may by prayer and supplication make known his requests unto God and receive from Heaven the light which he needs to guide him all the days of his life.

In the fourteenth verse we have a picture of a divinely protected man:

"And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand."

Saul knew almost to a field where David was, and yet it was impossible for Saul to lay his hand upon him. David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood; within such small limits had David been driven, and yet even within those limits Saul was as powerless as if he had been without a guide as to the exact location. Here we may be said to have two kings in opposition: the king of Israel and the King of heaven; the king of Israel is armed with all the power of his great position, and yet he is unable to touch a hair upon the head of his hated enemy. There is no romance in this situation. This, indeed, is being illustrated by the providence of every day. How near sometimes to destruction we are, sometimes nearer even than we think; our pursuer is in the next street; within one hour the whole history must close, for we are without further resource, and no help comes from without; the very night has come on which Herod will slay Peter; yet the angel comes before the enemy, and a great deliverance is wrought out for us by means we cannot understand. Surely they are wise who say it is the unexpected that always happens. David is almost within sight, or he is behind a clump of trees, or he passes immediately under the hand of Saul; and yet Saul has no power against him. If circumstances of this kind had not been corroborated by our own experience, we should have had difficulty in believing them; but what man is there of any length of life and variety of experience who cannot say, "When mine enemies and my foes came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell"? The enemy is not killed whilst yet a great way off; his hand is arrested in the very act of its being lifted to deal the fatal blow. "Though an

host should encamp against me, . . . in this will I be confident." "God is a very present help in trouble." "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." Nor is this to be construed into an occasion for self-boasting or impious confidence. David would learn more about the mystery and range of prayer through his being chased through woods and wildernesses, than he could ever learn as a mere matter of doctrine. The schoolhouse of God is very large, and as for his under-teachers, they are more than can be numbered. It is an error on our part to think that spiritual learning can only come in one way or through one set of teachers. The market-place is part of the schoolhouse, so is the battle-field, so is the chamber of affliction, so indeed are all the places which constitute the course of life.

In the sixteenth verse we have a beautiful exemplification of social ministry:

"And Jonathan, Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God."

How difficult to interpret is the providence that a man's own son should not only have turned away from him, but should have actually turned against him! There is a higher relationship in life than that of mere physical kinship. Jonathan was Saul's son, but that relation did not limit his position or responsibility. Men are the subjects of the crown of whatever State in which they reside, but when that crown is associated with bad laws the higher relation of the soul to God must be recognised and formed the basis of a higher loyalty. Pitiful indeed it is to see that a man's own son can be his opponent; yet there is another aspect even to that marvel, the aspect upon which is written the noble doctrine that conscience is stronger than consanguinity—in other words, that obligation to do that which is right is the strongest force that can operate in human thought and action. The narrator adds the beautiful words "strengthened his hand in God;" that is to say, comforted him with many assurances; stimulated him to believe that his course, though troubled, was right; brought to his mind the happy days in which the divine vision had shone upon him, and foretold the still brighter days in which he should enjoy the kingdom and be enriched with the benediction of God and of the people. There is no sympathy of the same quality

and gracious power as religious sympathy. All other condolence or fellow-feeling exhausts itself, but the sympathy which is based upon the recognition of the divine call and the divine co-operation is of necessity complete and permanent. Jonathan showed himself to be a large-minded man. What more natural than that he should think of himself as succeeding to the kingdom? And yet he never claims to be other than next to David and occupying an inferior position. In this respect the Jew may often rebuke the Christian. See to what magnanimity even the Jew could attain who knew nothing about the cross of Christ, and could know nothing about Christian justice and charity. Do we excel the Israelites in magnanimity? If not, we have failed to realise the grandeur of our vocation in Christ. It is nothing that we are familiar with the history of Israel, and can admire the moral greatness of its heroes, if we cannot add, and indeed happily exemplify the truth, "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest of Israel's princes."

Jonathan took the larger view of life; that is to say, when he looked out upon things he took in more field and more horizon than is generally included within the scope of inferior men. He said: "Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth" (v. 17). Jonathan thus fixed his vision upon destiny, and accepting that stern fact, he ordered his conduct accordingly. Here we have two different ways of acting in the matter of destiny: we have Saul's way, and we have Jonathan's. What was Saul's? It was a way of peevishness, opposition, and bitter hostility; it was a strenuous and even desperate attempt to turn back the purposes of Providence and reverse the decrees of Heaven. Saul kicked against the pricks; Saul seemed to apply his poor hands to smite the forces of Omnipotence, and he only suffered in the unequal contest. What was Jonathan's method of looking upon this solemn question of destiny or predestination? His way was to adopt it, to act in harmony with it, to believe that in the outworking of it the most gracious results would accrue. This was profound philosophy. When we see any man evidently called to a great leadership or to supreme influence,

however much our personal dignity may be supposed temporarily to be injured, depend upon it, we are only wise in proportion as we accept the new primacy and bid it good-speed, in the name of the Lord. The process indeed is not always easy; sometimes it amounts to little less than a living sacrifice, a burning out of the soul of the most inveterate elements of evil, the destruction as by fire of the spirit of envy, jealousy, and malice. If, however, we do not submit to undergo this process of purification, we shall become the victims of our own insanity, and be ground to powder by the calm but irresistible march of events. These reflections have their great spiritual application, as we have already seen. The coming King is the Son of God, and it is hard for any man to oppose his enthronement. In such a contest it is man who must go down, yea, even go down to the point of destruction. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him." It is in vain for any infuriated Saul to oppose the coronation of Christ in the world. "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth." He shall "break them with a rod of iron," and "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." It is remarkable that not only are the most gracious promises written in connection with the name of Christ, but also in association with that name are the most tremendous threatenings that ever appalled the human imagination. "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God." Blessed are they who accept the kingship of Christ and prostrate themselves before his throne in reverent loyalty and loving homage. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Here is the great Gospel which Christian apostles have never failed to preach, saying, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the case went hard with David a providential surprise came to his deliverance. When "Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain," there was but an inch of space between David and destruction. But at that very moment there came a messenger to Saul, saying, "Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land." Saul then turned back from following David, and the place was called "Sela-hammahlekoth"—namely, the rock of divisions. So again we come upon the doctrine, so often enforced, that "man's extremity is God's opportunity." Steadfastly abide in this doctrine, for it is no heathen proverb, but a part of the very philosophy of the divine government. Only when we are at the very edge of things, and are even looking over into the precipice below, can we know how near is the arm and how tender is the grace of God. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Even death shall not separate us from the arms of God. Upon all these matters the Church should utter no uncertain tone. Find a Church dejected, despairing, moaning about its difficulties and its sorrows, and lamenting its exposure to imminent danger, and you find a Church which has not entered into the spirit of a triumphant Christ. Rather should we say, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." That is the tone of triumph which alone becomes true faith; any other tone should be described not so much as a spiritual infirmity, as involving spiritual treachery. What did the heroic apostle say? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Nor did Paul exceed the saints of the Old Testament in the completeness and emphasis of his triumph. Did not the Psalmist say, "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid"? And again, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" And did not the holy prophet say, "There be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles"? History is wasted upon us if we are still wondering how the battle will go. To Christian faith the battle can only go in one way, and

that is the way of triumph for the Son of God. We must prove our faith by our steadfastness and willingness to suffer. We have not attained the manhood to which we are called in Christ Jesus until we can say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." When we can say these words, and exemplify them in actual life, we need have no fear of Saul, though we can feel his hot breath upon us; and no fear of the evil spirit, though all his legions be embattled against our life. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." "Lord, increase our faith."

SELECTED NOTE.

"*And Jonathan, Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood*" (1 Sam. xxiii. 16).—Jealousy and every mean or low feeling were strangers to the generous heart of Jonathan. Valiant and accomplished himself, none knew better how to acknowledge valour and accomplishment in others. The act of David in meeting the challenge of Goliath, and in overcoming that huge barbarian, entirely won his heart; and from that day forward the son of Jesse found no one who loved him so tenderly, who admired his high gifts with so much enthusiasm, or who risked so much to preserve him from harm, as the very prince whom he was destined to exclude from a throne. Jonathan knew well what was to happen, and he submitted cheerfully to the appointment which gave the throne of his father to the young shepherd of Bethlehem. In the intensity of his love and confidence he shrank not to think of David as his destined king and master; and his dreams of the future pictured nothing brighter than the day in which David should reign over Israel, and he be one with him in friendship, and next to him in place and council—not because he was covetous even of this degree of honour, but because "next to David" was the place where he wished always to be, and where he desired to rest.

When Saul began to hate David as his intended successor, he was highly displeased at the friendship which had arisen between him and his son. This exposed Jonathan to much contumely, and even to danger of life; for, once at least, the king's passion against him on this account rose so high that he cast a javelin at him "to smite him to the wall."

This unequivocal act taught Jonathan that the court of Saul was no safe place for David. He told him so, and they parted with many tears. David then set forth upon those wanderings, among strangers and in solitary places, which lasted all the time of Saul. The friends met only once more. Saul was in pursuit of David when he was in the wilderness of Ziph; and Jonathan could not forbear coming to him secretly in the wood to give him comfort and encouragement (xxiii. 16-18). Nothing more is related of Jonathan till both he and his father lost their lives in the fatal battle of Gilboa, combating against the enemies of their country. When informed of this catastrophe David uttered a lamentation (2 Sam. i. 17-27) over his lost friend, than which there is, perhaps, nothing in Hebrew poetry more beautiful and touching, or more full of fine images and tender thoughts.

1 Samuel xxiv. 16.

"Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept."

THE RECONCILIATION OF SAUL.

WE have considered the discipline of the anointed man.* Without attempting to cover the whole ground of David's trials, we laid down a few general principles showing that men need to be taught their weakness as well as their power. David, the deliverer of Israel, was hated and pursued by the very man who should have honoured and loved him most. "Saul said, I will smite David even to the wall;" "Saul said, Let the hand of the Philistines be upon him;" "Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines;" "Saul became David's enemy continually;" "Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David;" and whensoever Saul heard of the course of David's wandering, his heart burned with the fury of vengeance. This is a glimpse of the life of an anointed man. Truly, there be mysteries in human life which seem to shut out as with a wall of darkness the whole idea of God and spiritual government. In winter it is difficult to believe that in a few weeks the land will blush with the glowing colour of sweet flowers; in the blackness of night it is not easy to suppose that presently there will be a great flame in the heavens, and the sunny air will be full of singing birds. It is so with our poor life. God gives one great conquest into our hands, and then drives us away as with a furious wind of anger or contempt—a wind which often blows out the lamp of our hope, or throws down the tree whose shadow promised rest. It is in such hours that the heart's pain is turned into questions, and those questions are made bitter by the hopelessness, not of philosophical, but of experimental atheism. David says to us: Study my

* Vol. VI., page 351.

life; look how God dealt with me; put your trials into one scale, and mine into the other. "I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." Thus one man lives for many, and the sorrow of one soul gathers up the felt but unspoken woe of many generations. Let us try to find out something in the bitterness of David's experience which will help us more manfully and hopefully to live out our own few days.

1. Whilst the good man sees his own perils, let him also see the restraints which are put upon the wicked. Saul is mighty; Saul has servants; Saul is accustomed to dip his sword in human blood; yet he cannot hit David! Saul's javelin is shivering in the wall there. He meant it to pierce David's head. Saul was just on the point of slaying David, but that fact shows the nearer presence of spiritual defence. "When Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands." Why should we always look at the peril? Why not look at the escape, and find in its very narrowness the clearest proof of divine care?

2. Let the bad man put to himself some serious questions respecting the restraints which limit his power. Saul should have learned a good deal from the failures which followed each other in rapid succession. If enmity could have killed the Church, where would the Church have been this day? Fire, sword, bondage, hunger, torture, darkness—all have been tried. "Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented." And still their life rose up before men, a temple of God's building, beautiful as light, high as heaven. Why do the heathen so furiously rage? Evil is a gigantic failure; is there not a cause?

3. Though mediation may fail in carrying out its purposes, yet let no wise mediator suppose that his work is in vain. Jonathan was mediator between Saul and David. Mark his repeated and severe discouragements. Looking at it on one side, he might well have abandoned his work as a failure. What of its influence upon David? How it cheered him like a light! How it soothed him like the music of a better world! Be some man's true friend. No word of love is lost. No true ministry is a failure, though it may have aspects which are discouraging.

4. Observe the infinite superiority of power that is moral, as compared with power that is physical. Saul went to seek David upon the rocks of the wild goats. In his pursuit he came to the sheepcotes where there was a cave, and into that cave he entered, little knowing who was there (chap. xxiv.). Read the story. Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. What a difference between this and a mere fight of hostile weapons! (1) In the worst men there is something that may be touched; (2) in every life there is at least one opportunity of showing the real quality of the heart. David seized it. This is the sublime appeal of the Gospel. God does not crush us by mere power. Love, truth, persuasion,—these are the weapons of God's warfare.

Day by day we are in the power of God. We enter no cave where he is not: on the high, silent mountain, in the deep, shadowy valley, in the den of the wild beast, and in the nest of the eagle, there he is. When the lightning flashes, he says to the wicked man, See, with this I could have struck thee blind. When the storm howls madly across sea and desert and forest, he says: See, with this I could throw down thy dwelling-place, and bury thee in its ruins. But "as I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?"

PRAYER.

Almighty God, seeing that we are reconciled to thee by Jesus Christ, thy Son, our infinite Saviour, we will be glad in the house of thy choice, and sing aloud in the quiet sanctuary. Thy mercies surround us like a water of defence, and as streams that nourish the soul's life. Where they are, no drought can ever be. We praise thee for goodness upon goodness, higher than the great mountains; for blessing upon blessing, like the waves of the deep sea. Thou nourishest us; therefore are we strong: thou watchest us; therefore the enemy is kept at bay. When we sin against thee, thou dost weep over us like a grieved parent; and when we do that which is right, thou beamest upon our hearts more than the sun beameth in his strength. We praise thee; we love thee; our love is even deeper than our sin; purify us by the blood of the One Sacrifice, and fill our whole life with the sanctifying power of God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

1 Samuel xxvi. 25.

"Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail."

TWICE RECONCILED.

WE have seen the reconciliation of Saul, and had some reason to believe, from the tender words which Saul said, that he and David would be friends evermore. "Saul lifted up his voice and wept; and he said unto David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." When a man like Saul has wept, and spoken words so morally noble, it is but fair to credit him with sincerity and permanence. We have no hesitation in crediting him with sincerity. At the time of his reconciliation he meant every word he said. Yet in a brief period we find Saul going down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men to seek David, who had been reported as hiding himself in the hill of Hachilah. [The incident is given in chap. xxvi.] Then came the gush of emotion upon the part of Saul. The weapon which conquered him in the first instance

conquered him also in the second. Forbearance was mightier than weapons of war. The sword has slain its countless thousands, but love holds the universe in sweet and glad captivity. "Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." David knew the king better than the king knew himself. He knew too well that Saul was under the dominion of an evil spirit, so he said in his heart, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines;" and when it was told Saul that David had escaped to Gath, he sought no more for him. Our business is to read the lessons, applicable for ever, in the strange and sorrowful story of human life.

1. It is proved that the deepest and sincerest emotion may be transient in its moral effects. We left Saul reconciled; we find him again in arms. There are two things which are often mistaken for Christian feeling: (1) selfish gratitude for unexpected preservation; (2) admiration of moral nobleness in others.

See how this is applicable to hearers of the Gospel. Men hear of Jesus Christ's sympathy, love, beneficence.

Feeling may be exhausted. "Past feeling."

2. It is shown that self-control is in proportion to the estimate formed of the divine element that is in man. How was it that David withheld his hand when Saul was delivered over to him as lawful prey? Human nature said, Strike; another voice said, Forbear. Twice David might have slain Saul, and twice he spared his life. We want to know the secret of this most marvellous self-control. We find it pithily stated in the interview between Abishai and David. Abishai said, "Thine enemy;" David said, "The Lord's anointed." Two different views of the same man: the one narrow, selfish, superficial; the other profound and true. So it is with every man: he is not to be measured merely by his personal relations to ourselves. True, he may be our enemy, yet he may bear another aspect. Pray to see the highest and divinest aspect of every man's character.

We shall thus be enabled (1) to hope something even of the worst; and (2) to do something in the negative work of sparing, even where we cannot do anything in the positive work of reclaiming.

Paul had respect even for a weak man, not because he was weak, but because Christ died for him. By taking the highest view of man, he was enabled to do many things for the sake of the Christ that was in him. "But when ye so sin against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ."

3. It is shown how much better it is to trust our interests to the working out of divine laws than to care for them with narrowness of spirit. "As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him: or his day shall come to die: or he shall descend into battle and perish." Why fight with thy own poor weak fist? Why prefer murder to divine retribution? Why narrow down human life to a paltry duel?

The battle is not yours, but God's. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

4. It is clearly shown that flight from danger is perfectly compatible with the highest courage. David was never chargeable with cowardice, yet he escaped like an affrighted man. "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." There is a time to fight (Goliath); there is a time to fly (Saul). The one was an uncircumcised Philistine; the other was the Lord's anointed. Understand that there are differences of conquest. David conquered Saul as surely as he conquered Goliath. God sees his own image in us. To recover it, he sent his Son.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, when thou art near it is day, and when thou turnest aside it is night, in our souls. In thee is no darkness at all; dwell therefore with us, that we may live in light, and show forth all the beauty of thy presence. Withhold not thine ear from our prayer, nor close thine eyes when we come to see our Father's face. May we know how brief is the day of grace, and hasten ourselves lest we fail to serve thee with all our love. Help us to walk with God, and to have daily fellowship with the Father through his Son Jesus Christ. May we know the throne of grace as a refuge, and as the centre of our supreme delight; may we tarry there without weariness, and look upon thy face without fear. Take not thy Holy Spirit from us. Abide with us. Reign in our hearts. Put down all other lordships, and rule us altogether. We say this in the name of God the Son, who loved us and gave himself for us. Amen.

1 Samuel xxviii. 7.

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her."

SAUL AT ENDOR.

SAMUEL was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. The death of such a man so described! How graphic in its simplicity is this book of God! No common author could afford to treat his best materials in this way. The writer who spins himself into fine sentences would have dwelt long and carefully upon the death of Samuel; he would have told how dreary was the hollow sound of the moaning wind on the burial day, how tearfully came the moon to look at the new grave in Ramah, and how orphan-like and inconsolable were the stunned hosts of Israel. Such decorations do not make us richer; these perishable tapestries of the hireling's pen are out of season when a man like Samuel is called away to the starry places and the quietudes of the upper Zion. Samuel was dead! That is enough. Death is not poetical. The fine old cedar has fallen; let us turn aside, and be silent for a while.

But Saul! The dark day came when Saul needed a light; in its dread gloom, he looked Samuel-ward, but no fiery pillar glowed upon the old man's grave. Samuel was dead,—Saul was dead too; for though he lived, yet his heart's strength had withered, and his heart's joy had perished. Sometimes one life is all the world to us. So long as that dear life lives we cannot be altogether sad. The day may be very gloomy, but we have a bright light shining in the heart. So strange, too, is our human life, that even our neglect of that one redeeming power does not destroy its good influence; we know where it is; we are careless, yet not unappreciative; we are perhaps ungrateful, yet down in the very secret of the heart there is a living love; hence when trial comes, or swift darkness swallows up the path, or great firebolts strike the towers of our ambition, we hasten to the trusted one to hide ourselves in the love we never should have left. But what if we be too late? What if God have withdrawn the defence we have neglected, so that when we run to the familiar place, or hasten to the neglected door, we find a stranger there, or be answered only by the echoes of the silent chambers? The reckless young man says in his far-away wanderings, when money is gone and health is wasted, "I will return to the house of my childhood, and be glad amongst my old loves and hopes;" but the place knows him no more; a stranger's face is in the window of his home; he tells the tale of his shame to a heedless world; and soon there forces itself upon his reluctant consciousness the terrible truth that the breaker of hearts must be branded as the chief of murderers.

Not only was Samuel dead, but the Lord himself gave Saul no answer, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. It is of no use for some men to pray. They have sinned away the day of grace. By iniquity upon iniquity they have built up between themselves and God a great wall. By the exceeding multitude of their sins they have exhausted the patience of God. We had better say this very plainly, lest we encourage false hopes, and undertake a case which admits of no defence. If a man put out his own eyes, shall we urge him to try to see, and pity him because he is blind? If a man wilfully destroy his hearing, what boots it that we exhort him to listen? Madness!

To some men I have this message to deliver: You have shut yourself out from God,—you have deafened yourself against his counsel, and would none of his reproof,—you have starved the good angel within you which sang the sweet song of your youthful hope,—you have murdered your own soul: toll the knell; report the news in heaven: a man has slain the God that was in him, and now he awaits but the hour which shall see him thrown into the only darkness which can hide his shame. He is "without God and without hope in the world;" there is now no summer in his life; he is winter-bound and filled with desolation.

In the intensity of his fear Saul said, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her." What a fall, from the Lord God of Israel to a witch hiding in a cave! Even in such a fall there is much to teach us respecting the higher life of man. Better that a man should seek to consult the spiritual world through the medium of a witch than that he should be the most prosperous of materialists. That may seem a hard thing to say, but its hardness may be in its truth. Given two men, to say which is the wiser: the one is a materialist, who scorns the idea of God and all the other ideas which flow from it or properly belong to it; he has no faith, no anticipation of a spiritual future; to him there is nothing valuable but gold, and nothing certain but death; he prospers exceedingly in all the affairs of this life, and has more than heart can wish: the other worships a stone which is to him the image of God; he has faith in a spiritual region round about him; scientifically, he is utterly ignorant; socially, he is of the smallest account; theologically, he is in the lowest stratum of idolatry: given such men, to say which is the wiser, and unhesitatingly we pronounce for the wisdom of the idolater. Better worship a stone than never worship at all; better believe in an Indian's happy hunting ground beyond the grave than believe in no other life than this. The idolater occupies larger life-spaces than the materialist; he drinks at deeper springs; he hears a finer music in all the movements of creation. Of course we condemn belief in witches and in witchcraft; we laugh it to scorn. But what was Saul to do? Consider his education. Remember the tremendous and desolating loss which he had sustained: Samuel gone; the Philistines upon him; his reason

unsteady; the heavens, which dropped down dew upon his life, now hard as brass. He went to Endor in the hour of desperation. His theology might be ideally correct, but he could not use it,—God had gone up far beyond the cry of his pain, and Samuel was buried in Ramah. Thank God, in that hour Saul did not become a defiant atheist or materialist: he still believed in the divine and spiritual, and treated with impatience the mocking solaces of things seen and temporal. Pity the materialist more than you pity the heathen. Condemn materialism more strongly than you condemn the most fanatical displays of spiritualism: train your children to believe in ghosts rather than to believe in nothing but dust and death; the crudest, weakest faith is infinitely preferable to the animalism which makes man all flesh, or the insanity which only trains life so as to add another sting to the last enemy.

"Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel." The worlds are nearer together than we think. What is there in reason, in the fitness of things, or in Scripture itself, to forbid the idea that we are surrounded by spiritual existences? What is thy universe, O man? Thou makest thine own creation. Is it a poor little world, all surface, whose pools dry up, and whose roots disappoint the hunger of the body? Is thy world but a graveyard, cold, gloomy, death-governed, with hopelessness written on every stone, and flowers sickening and perishing on every dewless mound? At best, is it but a wheat-field and a vintage watered by a great river, but never bathed by the living tide of a spiritual eternity? It is a poor sad world, not such as thy Father meant it to be to thy soul. How different is the world to some of us! Round about it is a mantle of light: oft descending into its air are spiritual watchers and harpers sent to do us good, to save our feet from stumbling, and to comfort the soul during the drill and culture of this school-life; it is an isthmus connecting us with the immeasurable and everlasting; a bridge by which we pass into riches and rest, infinite and indescribable; a flying star-chariot, on which we hasten to sunnier climes; it exhausts all figures and images which signify emancipation, joy unspeakable, and glory ever-during. This faith is the gift of Jesus

Christ; when he was alone, he was not alone; he spoke of the angels being near: in the wilderness of temptation an angel ministered unto him; in the agonies of Gethsemane an angel strengthened him. The angels hastened Lot; the angel saved Daniel from hurt; the angel delivered Peter from prison; the angel spake to Paul on the stormy sea. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" Let us seize the inheritance, and be rich with all the Father's wealth.

The pathetic incident shows: 1. The rapidity with which a man may fall from the highest eminence. "Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day." There is but a step between thee and death.

2. The awful possibility of being cut off from spiritual communication with the divine and invisible. "God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams." "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." "Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the ancients."

3. The certainty that one day the impenitent will want their old teachers. "Bring me up Samuel." "I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

The solemn lesson of the whole is—Seek ye the Lord while he may be found. One day he will enclose himself within inaccessible depths; we shall cry, but he will not answer; we shall say, "Lord! Lord!" but he will not know us; we shall shout as men shout in mortal anguish, and only hear the mocking echo of prayer too long delayed.

1 Samuel xxix. 6; xxx. 6.

"The lords favour thee not."
"The people spake of stoning him."

ATHEISTIC REASONING.

THE trials which David underwent at the hands of Saul have now been fully dwelt upon; we now come to a different class of trials, viz., the afflictions which were laid upon David by the Philistines. When David was so severely persecuted by Saul, he went over to the Philistines; specially he allied himself with Achish, the Philistine king of Gath, and fought under his direction. David succeeded in winning the confidence of Achish, so much so that on one occasion Achish said to David, "Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head for ever." It came to pass, however, that when the Philistines saw David in the army of Achish, the princes of the Philistines were wroth, and said, "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him. . . . Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" So David's honour became the occasion of David's persecution and sore trial. That very song roused the jealousy of Saul, and now it excited the hatred of the princes of the Philistines. When Achish told David the decision of the princes, David pathetically expostulated: "But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" To this inquiry, so full of genuine feeling, Achish returned a noble reply: "I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle." Remember, David was an anointed man. Saul hated him, and the Philistines cast him out. Samuel had anointed him with oil, and, lo,

he was despised of men. He had slain the enemy of Israel, yet Israel spat upon his name. He had served the Philistines, yet their princes drove him away with bitter reproaches. Nor was this all. When David came to Ziklag, he found that the Amalekites had burned the city with fire, and taken all the people into captivity. So terrible was the feeling of the men, that they spoke of stoning David, because the soul of every man was grieved for his sons and for his daughters. Some very serious questions are forced upon us by this condition of affairs. Where was God? Where was the prophecy of Samuel? What was the value of divine election? Would it not have been better for David to have broken away from old vows and old hopes, and to have plunged into courses which would have given him instant pleasure? Let it be clearly understood that the story, viewed as illustrative of providential care, is by no means so dark as it looks. Somewhere we shall find an explanatory word. In reading history, always seek for the moral key. In estimating personal life, never forget to search the heart. The mysteries of providence are sometimes only the shadows of our own misjudgments and immoralities.

1. We find the secret of David's ill-fortunes amongst the Philistines in these words: "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines; and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand." This is the first piece of atheistic reasoning which we have met in the life of David. The old tone is wanting. This is the talk of a Philistine, so to the Philistines let him go. David takes his own case into his own hands; let him, then, learn the folly of his wisdom and the weakness of his strength. There are three things in life which must lead to disappointment, shame, and ruin:—(1) Atheistic self-trust; (2) immoral and unnatural associations; and (3) duplicity and equivocation.

All these we find at this period of David's life. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him;

and he shall bring it to pass." A standard of judgment is thus supplied to every man. Where did we break down? It is a moral collapse. At what point did it set in? We may not be able to charge ourselves with a violent apostacy, but what of imperceptible decay?

2. David having brought himself into difficulties with the Philistines, the question was how to get out of those difficulties, and resume the old relations? The way of error is never easy. David thought he had found a nest of comfort, but, behold, there was a serpent in the nest, and it threatened his very life. These atheistic nests are very uncertain dwelling-places. They look inviting, but the wind will surely tear them in pieces. How did God deliver his servant? Through the wrath of David's enemies. Suppose the Philistines had been pleased with him! Imagine for a moment the state of affairs if the princes had promoted him to honour, and laid him under the spell of their cruel blandishments. David complained of their treatment, not knowing that God was blowing up the rock in order to make a way of escape. Mark three things: (1) God does not easily or willingly cast off his erring children; (2) social injustice or cruelty may have a meaning never intended by its perpetrators; (3) the destruction of present securities may prepare the way for complete and enduring rest.

3. Though David had experienced severe trials manifestly sent by the hand of God, he was to be saved from ruinous conclusions by seeing what it was to fall into the hands of men. We sometimes suppose that if we could get clear of God, things would go easily with us. We think that by giving up religion we can escape difficulty. Be a materialist, and all will be well. Join the Philistines, and put an end to your miseries. Let us correct our reasoning by looking soberly at facts. How was it with David? The Philistines thrust him away, and his own men spake of stoning him. How false is the supposition that in escaping religion we escape trial! For example, the case of a minister giving up his ministry to make money; or the case of a good man quenching his religious convictions, and uniting with evil-doers.

4. A better spirit came upon David. "He came unto himself." He was even as a returning prodigal. Hear the music of his better mood: "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." From that hour the light came, and deliverance, and victory upon victory. For a time David had taken his life into his own hand; now he returned unto God, and made his peace with heaven. Woe unto the troops of Amalek in that day! "David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day."

To every man there is a lesson. Come, let us return unto the Lord. We have wandered amongst enemies, and felt the bitterness of their treatment; we have strayed from the sanctuary, and gone into the land of idols and strange gods, and have seen how lifeless and powerless are the images carven by the cunning of men; we have broken our vows and forgotten our deliverances; we have taken charge of our own life, and it has perished in our keeping. Come, let us return unto the Lord; let us say, "We have sinned, and are no more worthy to be called thy children;" let us get back to the old foundations, the rock of righteousness and the stone of Zion; and who can tell how much of heaven we shall enjoy on earth?

"HANDFULS OF PURPOSE"

FOR ALL GLEANERS.

"... *only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard.*"—1 SAM. i. 13.

Yet it was possible to form some opinion of the agitation of Hannah's mind.—It was known that she was not in a jovial mood, but that her soul was cast down within her.—The power of the soul to write itself on the face is indicative of its still larger power to write itself on all the circumstances and events through which it passes, and upon the society with which it comes in contact. —Now and again we see vivid instances of mind triumphing over matter; never perhaps is this so signally seen as when grief enters into the heart, and writes its grim signature on the whole countenance.—These indications of mental action may of course be misunderstood, as in the case of Hannah.—Though Eli was a priest, he was not sufficiently penetrating to understand what Hannah was doing.—He who ought to have been a prophet, a very seer of God, looking at the heart and reading all its woe, said in tones of harshness, "How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee."—When sorrow is misunderstood it is doubled.—When men understand our grief, and speak to us in its own tone, they go far towards removing the heartache which makes us groan. When priests misunderstand their age, either in its totality or its individuality, they make the most profound mistakes, and throw insult where they ought to offer benediction.—We can conduct a silent ministry in life.—We can be known as men of prayer without causing our voice to be heard in the streets: we can express our joy without blatancy; we can show how truly wise we are without trumpeting our own greatness. —Sometimes all we can do is to move the lips; the voice will not come through the choked throat, or if it did come we should not know it, it would not be our voice, but another, tortured by the spirit of grief.—Let us yield to our emotions up to a given point, but always seek to have some measure of control over them; otherwise we may by exaggeration or wantonness allow our character to be honestly misunderstood, and vilified with some show of reason.

"*There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.*"—1 SAM. ii. 2.

How our theology is affected by our circumstances! It is needful to note this in the case of Hannah, lest we give her credit for too much religion.—Her prayer had been answered, her heart was full of joy, her mouth was enlarged over her enemies, and she saw in her little child a whole posterity of noble men.—Under such circumstances, she

magnified the Lord, saying there was none so holy as he, and indeed there was none other beside him; and as for the rock of the enemy, it was not to be compared unto her God.—Sometimes we are religious only because we are happy; sometimes we are pious only because we have received what we asked for.—There is no particular gratitude or religion in recognising bounty which has been heaped upon us contrary to expectation.—The great test of religion is to magnify God when he denies our prayers; when we ask for much and receive nothing, it is then hard to say (but in proportion to its hardness is its goodness) that there is none holy as the Lord, and none beside him in heaven or in earth.—This need not check the natural and proper expression of thankfulness when great mercies have been received; that is always not only desirable, but just and reasonable; at the same time let it be firmly fixed in our minds as a lesson that ought to affect our whole thinking, that God is supremely good when he denies,—that he is as much Father when He says No as when he says Yes. We must not mistake mere exultancy of animal spirits for religious enthusiasm.—There is a great temptation to do this.—But all such exultancy has a necessary reaction, and then, having mistaken the exultancy, we also mistake the depression, and think that God has forgotten to be gracious.—He lives the true and noble life who casts himself lovingly into God's hands, and says, Whatever God does is right: be it day, or be it night; be it summer, or be it winter, when it is of his sending, it must be welcomed as his gift.

"*Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial.*"—1 SAM. ii. 12.

This is one of the unaccountable circumstances in life.—We should have said there is a law of cause and effect, and that because Eli was a good man his sons would partake of his spiritual quality.—Eli was a priest, and if a weak man he was undoubtedly a good man; and yet his sons served the devil, not knowing the very Lord in whose name they ministered, but going through all their duties as part of a mechanical routine.—It does not say they were imperfect men, subject to divers temptations, eccentric, occasionally doing wrong; but they were corrupted in their very souls; they had changed their fatherhood, so they who were sons of God, and sons of God's priest, were adopted into the family of Belial, and bore the image and superscription of their new father.—This reminds us of many contradictions in character.—A son of civilisation may be a child of barbarism.—A man who has received a high education may prostitute his talents to all manner of evil.—A child brought up in the sanctuary may sing the hymns of the Church for the amusement of its enemies.—They who have been brought up in the school of refinement may betake themselves to the veriest vulgarity, in criticism, in prejudice, in haughtiness.—We hold nothing as it were permanently; we are always upon our good behaviour; we have to watch every moment, and pray that our hands and feet and head and lips, yea, our whole manhood in every faculty and power, may be kept under the restraining and sanctifying influences of God.—A double damnation is theirs who had high advantages to begin with.—How deep the hell into which they plunge who fall out of a good man's house—fall from within the very shadow of the sacred altar! When Jesus Christ denounced those who heard him and who rejected him, he denounced those most severely who had had the greatest privileges conferred upon them.—If we are to be judged by our privileges, how

appalling is the position of men who have been brought up in Christian countries, and yet have rejected every opportunity of becoming religiously wise and good !

"... *men abhorred the offering of the Lord.*"—1 SAM. ii. 17.

This is the natural consequence of the character of those who ministered that offering.—The sons of Eli, being themselves sons of Belial, brought the whole work into contempt.—Hophni and Phinehas were more than mere individuals; they were priests in the sanctuary, and, acting in their priestly capacity, they brought the whole work of the sanctuary into disdain.—It is easy to say to men that they should take heed of the work, and not of the workers, but to most men it is impossible to make the distinction.—If the work has had so poor an effect upon the workers, what effect can it have upon those who merely look on?—In this respect the worker has a high responsibility; though his thoughts, his argument, or his eloquence may not be understood, his character can be perused by all who are frankminded, and who earnestly desire to know the results of communion with God.—God himself takes notice of those who bring his work into derision:—"I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. . . . And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them."—God has not issued his commandment and defined his work, and left both to take care of themselves: he watches from on high how the commandment is received, how the work is done, how priests and ministers and agents of all kinds conduct themselves, and he comes with blessing or judgment, according to their specific action.—God is not dependent upon one priest, or one family of priests; though all who now bear his name may abandon his altar, yet that altar shall be well served:—"I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind; and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever."—Thus the Lord conducts a retributive providence.—The Lord never allows himself to be insulted with impunity.—They who have repulsed his approach, or dishonoured his robes, or cast disrepute upon his altar, shall be thrown out of their houses, and they who once had great opportunities shall come and crouch to the faithful priest for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, "Put me I pray thee, into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."—Men shall one day come to know what privileges they have enjoyed, and what opportunities they have lost.—Let us be faithful now, and watchful ever, for we know not how near we may be to the exhaustion of our function, if so be we have not administered it with faithfulness.

"... *the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli.*"—1 SAM. iii. 1.

Have children been recognised properly by the Church? Have we not supposed that wisdom, experience, great maturity of character were all necessary for the ministration of the sanctuary?—There is a sense, of course, in which that is perfectly true: there is, however, another aspect which ought not to be disregarded by those who would

assist in the organisation of a complete and effective Church.—Where are the children? Is not the service of God made a weariness to them? Are they not placed in the most awkward and undesirable positions in religious buildings? Is one definite thought given to them, or one special prayer offered for them, or are they called to any form of service in the Church?—It is vain to say that children do not understand, for who really can understand all the word of the Lord in its proper range and meaning?—Understanding, in any case, is a relative term.—We have no right to put too much upon a child, and we have no right to withhold from a child whatever duty it can execute.—The child who cannot turn a millstone may pluck a flower.—The little one who cannot enter into grammatical controversies may repeat its own sweet verse or hymn, and out of the mouths of babes and sucklings God may ordain praise.—Never are children spoken to in a congregation in a loving and intelligent manner without adults being also profited.—Whoever can simplify the truth, so as to bring any portion of it within the comprehension of a child does an essential benefit even to men of advanced years.—There is no lovelier picture on all the earth than a ministering child—whether it minister in things distinctively religious, whether it take its place in the Christian choir, or whether it be called upon to do some deed of love in the family; its very littleness, youthfulness, weakness, entitle it to attention, and constrain the heart so as to affect the whole soul with the purest emotions.—Whilst children ought not to be unduly urged forward, they should be lovingly recognised as having some part in the utterance of the music which alone can express the love of God.

"*Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him.*"—1 SAM. iii. 7.

Yet he was in the sanctuary; he was connected with Eli; he had a great destiny before him.—We are taken at various points, God always knowing our age and our capacity, and not expecting more from us than we can render.—It is not necessary to know the Lord in any purely intellectual sense before we engage in some department of his service.—Samuel was the child of prayer, Samuel had been lent unto the Lord, Samuel had but one destiny, according to the purpose of his mother; yet "Samuel did not yet know the Lord."—Observe the word "yet," and find in it an abundance of encouragement.—We cannot know all things now; we know in part, therefore we prophesy in part.—There are words of limitation, such as this *yet*, which are at the same time words of encouragement; on the one side they seem to discourage us, and on the other they are bright with hope.—"What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter" may be said to every Samuel and to every Peter in the Church.—Let us be faithful to what we do know.—We can at least be in the sanctuary, expecting to hear messages from heaven, and showing our readiness to obey them when they come; we need not be far to fetch when the Master comes and asks for us.—Blessed are they who linger about the altar, and who find pleasure in waiting on the threshold of the sanctuary; for when the Lord comes they shall be ready to accept the duty which he assigns them.—A beautiful expression is this: "Neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him,"—it was to come; he was being prepared for it; his life pointed in one direction, and God recognised the direc-

tion, and honoured it.—This is open to us, every one.—We can show what we would be if we could, where we would always be, how we would always act; if we supply these conditions, God will not withhold his discretion or his blessing.

"*The Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel.*"—1 SAM. iii. 21.

This is a species of incarnation.—The Lord is said to appear through the medium of good men.—When they appear, he appears, so that each may say, He that hath seen me hath seen the Lord; he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.—The principle of incarnation runs from end to end of the Bible.—Wherever God finds a humble heart he dwells within it, and through that heart he manifests himself to all beholders.—Revelation is incarnation. —He who knows most of the truth shows forth most of the glory of God. —He who prays most ardently brings God most nearly to the consciousness of men.—God appears in any country when he reveals himself in the hearts and minds of his servants: they themselves may have some control over this: —"Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "Ye have not, because ye ask not."—O that we had hearkened unto God's commandments, for then our peace had flowed like a river, and God's revelation within us would have been patent and fascinating to all men.

"*And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp.*"—1 SAM. iv. 7.

Even those who do not openly believe in God dread his power.—Theoretically the Philistines would have laughed at God, but when they were sure that the God of the Hebrews had come into the camp their interest wakened and all their armour seemed to be of no avail; they were clothed with straw, and a great fire was advancing upon them.—The Philistines were not afraid of the Hebrews as such, for the Hebrews were but ordinary men: but when the Hebrews were associated with their God, and God had shown himself ready to operate on their behalf, then the whole earth as represented by the Philistines was afraid, and fell down in uttermost despair.—So it will be with all the enemies of God everywhere.—They are not afraid of literature, of science, of philosophy, of eloquence, of money, of mechanism: but when the Church is inspired, when it lives and moves and has its being in God, when it arises to a due apprehension of its function, then men begin to feel that the Church is invested with an influence that is not earthly, and therefore is not measurable. —Our whole hope is in God.—We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us.—If God is not in our camp we can do nothing but make a vain display of impotent resources; but when God comes into the camp, then our little is turned into much—yea, our very nothingness is magnified into an infinite force.—Let us cry mightily for God.—Let us say, "Why standest thou afar off, O God?"—Let us exclaim with our whole heart, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth."—When we call thus for God he will not turn a deaf ear to us, if so be our hearts are pure, and our spirit marked by candour, earnestness, and love.

"*I-chabod.*"—1 Sam. iv. 21.

When the daughter-in-law of Eli, the wife of Phinehas, heard that the ark of God was taken, and that her

brother-in-law and her husband were dead, she called the child that was born in that hour "I-chabod," saying, "The glory is departed from Israel."—Thus children are born into distressing circumstances.—Men come into the world when the world's history is deeply shadowed, when there is indeed little to be seen but cloud and storm.—How fortunate, as we say, have some men been in the time of their birth; they came into the world when everything was budding with promise, when the vernal air was awakening the whole earth, and beauty was about to clothe every plant that grew.—Others are born under circumstances that depress the spirit; everything is backward, disheartened, utterly without hope as to the future; nothing answers the touch of fire or the cry of inspiration; there is no contagion in enthusiasm, and prayer itself is an empty vessel.—We have no control, of course, over the times when we come into the world, but we should take their character into account in estimating our influence.—He may do a great work who comes into the world in a dark hour, though it may contrast but poorly with the work which is done by men who were born under radiant advantages.—The thought that applies to the matter of birth in relation to an age applies also to all positions of trust and usefulness; ministers come to churches under infinite disadvantages; merchants undertake the conduct of businesses that have been blighted or complicated and thrown into the most uncontrollable disorders; men are called upon to discharge the duties of life who have been born into bodies that are heavily afflicted,—all these things ought to be taken into account in estimating the work which we are doing in our day and generation.—Herein it is well that God himself is judge, and not man. He knows our parentage, our difficulties, our disadvantages, our constitution, the peculiar conditions in which we have begun our work, and in adding up all these, and assigning our reward, he will be just with the justice of love.

". . . *there he built an altar unto the Lord.*"—1 Sam. vii. 17.

What has Samuel been doing all the time but this very work?—How delightful to think of a whole life being consecrated to altar-building and altar-service! Where did Samuel build this altar?—He built it at "Ramah."—But what made Ramah more conspicuous than other places?—"there was his house" is the answer.—Where his house was his altar was.—Blessed is that house that gathers itself around the altar, making the altar the centre and the principal force in the entire building.—Not only was the house of Samuel at Ramah,—at Ramah Samuel "judged Israel." He did his official work in that city, and where he did official work he built his altar.—The man could not do without the altar; the judge could not do without the altar; the altar is essential to the entire development of life.—Have an altar in your house; have an altar in your business; have an altar in the very centre of your life.—When you return to your Ramah, forget not your religious duties; let them have the first and foremost place in your thought.—Samuel was now a great man—"he went from year to year in circuit to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places."—But though his mind was thus occupied with intricate questions or vexatious details, as certainly as he returned to his house he returned to his altar, and when at the very centre of his administration he ascended the seat of judgment, he passed to that judgment seat from the altar of God.—Blessed is the country whose

judges worship the true and living God. Blessed still more is the country whose houses are churches, whose homes are consecrated to the service of the Most High.—Peeps of this kind into the private life of great men enable us to estimate somewhat the secret of their influence.—He who prays well judges well. He who honours God in his house shall be honoured of God, by his house becoming a pavilion, a resting-place, a sanctuary of the divine presence.

"*Samuel prayed unto the Lord.*"—1 SAM. viii. 6.

This showed great self-control on the part of Samuel, seeing that he was "displeased" by the demand of the people for a king.—Rarely do we find prayer and displeasure linked together in the same sentence.—When men are displeased they pour malediction upon the head of those who occasion the displeasure; but in this case the man who was wounded turned his attention to heaven and poured out his sorrow before the Lord.—The best and noblest men may be deposed from office by the caprice of the people.—The reasons of such deposition do not appear on the surface.—There are reasons within reasons.—It required the Lord himself to explain to Samuel how it was that the people had become disaffected towards him,—it was not a case of rejecting Samuel, it was a case of rejecting the Lord himself.—When men get wrong religiously they necessarily get wrong socially, and oftentimes the cause is not inquired for beyond the social line: so we speak of discontent, disloyalty, rebellion, and we look for political causes, and we try political remedies, whilst all the time we have not gone deep enough, or we should have found that the rebellion is at the root of religious disaffection.—"For they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." When we accept the Lord's sovereignty we are quite willing to receive the under-sovereigns whom he may appoint, and who vindicate their appointment by wisdom and beneficence: but when we reject the Lord himself all that comes below that title necessarily falls in the first overthrow.—The process takes the same course, only inversely, in reference to social reclamations; we must begin religiously rather than politically, or if we begin politically it must be that we may get a stronger hold upon the people to affect them religiously.—The supreme lesson is that no reform is worth undertaking or consummating that is not founded upon the eternal principles of religion.—We must be theological in the best sense before we can be philanthropical in any sense that touches reality and effects permanent healing.

"*And the Lord said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king.*"—1 SAM. viii. 22.

A most awful communication this to make on the part of the living God.—There are some compliances which indicate the deepest of all differences.—God gives men the request of their heart, and sends leanness into their soul.—They who rejoice in answers to prayer should recall the nature of the prayer itself, and ascertain thoroughly that the prayer was founded in wisdom and expressed a real necessity of the life.—Where our prayer expresses nothing but whim, prejudice, passing taste, or changeful mood; or where it is inspired by a spirit of selfishness, the answer to it is the most tremendous condemnation which even God can inflict upon the suppliant.—Answered prayer is in itself nothing; we must first know what the prayer is, and

having discovered the nature of the prayer we should be able to estimate the value of the answer.—All king-making is child's play.—The people asked for a king as they might have asked for an idol; it was no spirit of loyalty that was rising in them towards monarchical institutions; it was simply the play of a fickle spirit, the action of a soul that was devoid of all moral permanence in its elections and pursuits.—A king elected so easily and so superficially may be thrown off with equal facility.—It is the same with the election of friends.—They who make their friends easily, dispose of them easily.—It is the same with learning, with discipline, with all manner of high pursuit; "easy come, easy go," is a proverb which may apply very fittingly to them.—The king was made at God's command, in the sense of God's permission being given.—It does not therefore follow that the king was of God's choice.—A fatal thing it may be for a man to have his own way; for the moment it is pleasant, for the moment the man may congratulate himself upon the happy issue; but all things are to be tested by the end.—When once the heart goes roving after new sovereigns, it is impossible to tell how the fickleness may culminate.—The love of change grows by exercise of choice.—He has attained the highest point of discipline who accepts the highest ordinations of providence and waits for God himself to open new doors and create new opportunities.—Whatever we change, we must never change the kingship of Jesus Christ.—All other kings whom he may send to reign over us intermediately must be left to his control and discipline; he sets up and he puts down, and all his providence is an exertion on behalf of the fullest and deepest interests of his kingdom.—Man is fond of creating institutions.—Such creation gives an opportunity for the exercise of his inventive faculties to make a new toy, to establish a new order, to invent a new decoration, to bring about the setting up of a new throne; all these are the infantile exercises of the human mind.—He only is right who says, The Lord reigneth, and by virtue of his sovereignty he will control all under-reigns, and bring all the forces and ministries of life to co-operate in the outworking of a divine dominion.

"*Thou . . . shalt be turned into another man.*"—1 SAM. x. 6.

Thus God creates man after man, even in the same individual.—We cannot tell how many natures there are within us, and how many capacities, how many slumbering faculties, how many high and noble possibilities.—Man is as a riddle to himself, and only God has the solution.—Infinite comfort arises from the thought of possible newness of personality; if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things have passed away, and all things have become new: we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.—Surely here is an instance of the operation of the great law of development; the man is the same, yet not the same; he has an identity which can be recognised, and a responsibility which can be called upon to answer all challenges that are addressed to it, and yet the man himself may be totally new, quite another man from what he was but yesterday.—A man is turned into another personality when his convictions are changed, when the object of his worship is elevated, when his view of the universe is enlarged, when his recognition of duty is purified and refined, and when his whole sympathy creates for itself new channels.—The newness is therefore a moral re-creation.—There is no physical transformation

there is no disguise of the outer man; there is no veiling that is of the nature of hypocrisy: the newness is real and vital, because it is a newness of heart, of feeling, of aspiration, of desire: when the things which satisfied a man once satisfy him no longer, when the earth is too small to give him all the gratification which he needs, when time is too shallow to enable him to develop the whole of his being, when he feels his need of larger space, longer time, added light, and multiplied facilities of education and growth, he is in very deed "another man."—It is thus that the power of Christianity is socially displayed.—When a man who was known as a thief becomes honest; when the ferocious man becomes gentle; when the avaricious disposition becomes liberal; when the narrow and bigoted nature expands into breadth and sympathy, then also a miracle has been wrought, the old man has been cast off with his deeds, and the new man has been established in righteousness.—"Ye must be born again."—Observe that a man becomes another man, in the sense of this text, not by his own effort, but by an exercise of divine energy:—"And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man:" man can debase himself, can turn himself into another man in the sense of degrading his nature, so that his own parents may be ashamed of him, and his most familiar friends may cease to pronounce his name: that is not the transformation which is here spoken of; this is an elevation, an expansion of the whole nature, such an enlargement of faculty and sensibility as to bring God nearer the soul in endearing and comforting consciousness.—No man can be in Christ Jesus, and yet remain as he was before; his whole house will know that he has given his loyalty to a new sceptre, and pledged his consecration to a higher altar: his enemies will know it, for he will treat them with surprising grace, and make it his business to open the way towards forgiveness and reconciliation: his workmen, his children, his companions, his associates in every grade and relation of life will know that he has cast off the former things and connected himself with a deeper philosophy and a broader, more generous philanthropy.—Because Christianity can do these things its propagation should be the supreme business and highest delight of men.

"*Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there.*"—1 SAM. xi. 14.

The mind should be fixed upon the possibility of renewal in life.—Life is full of beginnings; that is, full of new chances and new opportunities.—Take, for example, the Sabbath, as opening a new week; the morning, as opening a new day; the birthday, as introducing a new period of time; the new year, as an hour when the old may be forgotten and a deeper order of things may be inaugurated: take youth and manhood, leaving school, entering business, forming associations and companionships:—all these indicate the possibility of reformation, reconstruction, the utterance of larger prayer, and entering into the bondage of Christ, which is the sweetest liberty.—It is beautiful also to notice how at certain places we make certain vows with fitness.—Samuel would have the people go to Gilgal, that the kingdom might be renewed.—It is well to associate given places with the best exercises of the religious life.—This is the birthplace, the place where the word of trust was first spoken, the spot of ground on which

the first altar was built, the point in space at which the first great prayer was consciously uttered, the church wherein the deepest religious impressions were made and the holiest relations of life were formed; in going back to such places we revive memories, and rekindle hopes, and awaken inspirations, that may have been suspended.—Blessed are they whose life-road is crowded with places at which holy words were spoken, and sweet realisations of Christ were enjoyed.—We might thus plant the earth like a garden, and make many places not beautiful in themselves supremely beautiful by moral association and spiritual suggestion.—If any man has broken away from the true kingdom, he may even now renew it.—If any man is conscious of unfaithfulness to Christ's sceptre, let him go to some consecrated place and there repent of his sin and renew his fealty.—We need voices such as Samuel's to encourage us in the attempted renewal of all lofty purposes.—People become depressed, they are cast down by reason of the weight of their burdens, they are overcome by a consciousness of their sin and shame, and they have not heart to think of rekindling the fire that has expired:—it is in such periods of depression and gloom that the voices of such men as Samuel come as music from heaven, giving men to feel that even yet they may be recovered of the plague of disloyalty, and even yet may renew associations in which they once delighted.—Whosoever will, let him come.—Preachers of the everlasting kingdom should be the most cheerful of men, full of spiritual animation, characterised by all intellectual and moral vivacity, always alluring men to brighter worlds, and always leading the way.

"*Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers.*"—1 SAM. xii. 7.

Samuel now enters upon a difficult part of his vocation.—The minister of Christ has to exercise a variety of functions: sometimes teaching, sometimes rebuking, sometimes comforting, sometimes reasoning and expostulating in a tone that may have in it, however subtly, somewhat of rebuke and judgment.—The appeal which Samuel makes is a noble one.—He is not going to smite the people with thunder and lightning, but to "reason" with them, to state the case in all its historical bearings, to sum up all the providence of God and ask them to make inferences from the great historical review.—The appeal which religion makes to a man is the largest appeal that can be addressed to his understanding, to his memory, and to his imagination.—The Lord does not rest his case on what was done to-day, or yesterday; he goes back to the beginning of time, to the dawn of memory, and he asks that all the way along which he has led the people may be viewed in its entirety and seen in its suggestive shape; then the people may answer whether the purpose of the Lord has been good or evil.—Nothing is to be feared from a large and complete survey of providence.—All the mischief arises from taking in too little field.—We think of the affliction, and forget the comfort; we think of the bereavement, and forget how our very loss became a gain; we look at the grave where the body lies, and forget the heaven where the spirit sings.—Every man should take in his whole life when he would estimate the nature of the government under which he lives.—How did the man's life begin, what were his early disadvantages, how were they

overcome, how were they so transformed as to become actual advantages, how were gates opened for which there was no key?—Let a man answer all these questions, and the whole crowd of inquiries to which they belong, and he will soon begin to see that there is a hand stronger than his own guiding the destiny of his life.—A review of providence should become a great theological argument.—Omit nothing from your purview; the very finest traces are needful to complete the picture; the palest tints are as necessary as the most vivid colours to effect thorough representation of the divine purpose.—How many men have come to see that their losses have been the beginning of their profit!—How many are able to realise that but for the tears they shed their sensibilities would have been less refined and less responsive to all the appeals of heaven!—We are educated by the providence of God; not by this particular phase of it, or that transient act, which has scarcely remained long enough to be noticed, but by the totalising of the way; at the end we begin to see that God's meaning was good from the first, that no weight has been too heavy, no cloud too dense, no bereavement too painful, but that everything has been meted out to us with that measure which wisdom alone could calculate and mercy alone dispense.

"*And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee.*" —1 SAM. xii. 10.

Commercial piety is the subject of this text.—Men who have forsaken the Lord and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth do not seem to have come from the forbidden altar with very exalted ideas of duty.—Those who serve false gods must expect to have perverted consciences. Here we find Israel actually endeavouring to bargain with God for the price of worship.—If thou wilt deliver, we will serve. To us it seems incredible that the proposition could have taken this form; yet this is the very form which it takes in our own life day by day.—It is often in the hope that we may gain something that we do many a religious service.—Sometimes it is the hope that we may be able to stave off some calamity: sometimes it is that we may be recovered from a great affliction: sometimes it is that a child may be saved from death, or turned back from ways of rebellion and iniquity: sometimes it is that we may make sure of heaven.—It is almost impossible to exclude selfishness from the action of our pious sentiments. Even when we think we have subdued self, it reappears in many an unexpected form.—We may even say to ourselves that we will not contemplate any ulterior gain or advantage, and yet there may be a sub-consciousness that after all some real personal good may come of our prayer or gift or sacrifice. No man repents of his sin until he sees the sin itself in its naked and unpardonable deformity, rather than its merely penal consequences which extort a cry of regret or a promise of amendment.—When the heart is given to God it must be unconditionally, with all the unreserve of love, pure and absolute. If there should be some taint of selfishness in our best endeavours, yet our desire to extinguish it will be accepted as a conquest on the part of God, who always magnifies our purposes and regards them as accomplished facts. Let that be no bargaining with heaven. Our duty is clear, whatever the result may be.—Is our service of so great consequence to God that it is worth his while to deliver us from any danger

or fear?—Do we not over-estimate ourselves?—Is there not an element of intense selfishness in this offer of service and consecration?—If the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!

"... *all the people followed him trembling.*"—1 SAM. xiii. 7.

We are reminded of the words—"Faint, yet pursuing."—The people were trembling, yet even in their trembling they were following their king and leader—"The men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in the rocks, and in high places, and in pits."—It is in extremities that the quality of men is tested.—Saul was now overborne; yet he was called upon to take some definite action, and the people, though with great misgiving and trembling of heart, went after him.—There is a following that is the mere expression of despair; it is either attempting to follow, or it is dying in solitude and starvation; the very path seems to be but a choice of evils; no great credit therefore is due to the men who simply preferred one form of extinction to another.—Here is the press of military discipline, even in this state of disorganisation.—Saul was at the head, Saul was in his right place, and the people were following, though in great weakness and trepidation.—It must be so with the followers of Christ; he is the Captain of our salvation; he is not to be superseded, or overrun, or in any way displaced: even when he seems to be going forth to a fruitless war he is to be followed by stout hearts.—Trembling is permitted even in Christian experience. There is a trembling that is significant of reverence; there is also a trembling which means self-misgiving or self-distrust.—When we are weak, then are we strong.—If so be we renounce our own strength, and place absolute confidence in God, we may tremble so far as we are personally concerned, yet under all the trembling there is a rock of assurance, a complete and steadfast faith in the ultimate rule of God.—"Perfect love casteth out fear."—A man may either pray that the Philistines may be diminished in strength, or that his own courage may be stimulated to a higher degree: the latter is the nobler prayer: to conquer simply because our enemies have been decimated by fire or tempest or plague is a very poor victory: but to rise to the occasion by the inspiration of love, by the confidence of growing faith, and to smite sharply and heavily in the strength of God,—this is the victory which all Christians should seek to realise; this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.—Where faith is strong, one will chase a thousand, and two will put ten thousand to flight. Our prayer should not be that our enemies may be diminished, but that we may be the more perfectly qualified to encounter and overthrow them.—This is also a call to victory over our own passions: we are not to wait until old age has cooled the blood, or until many infirmities have taken away all desire for the delights of sin; in the very heyday of life, when the blood is at fullest heat, when temptations are a thousand strong, all plying the soul with continual importunity,—it is even then that we may rise to a sense of supreme strength, it is even then that we may live the noble and beneficent life.—The great Christian lesson is that we are to follow Christ, however extreme the danger, however improbable the success, however hopeless the issue so far as our own strength is concerned,—we go forward, we go to the battle in the name and strength of the Lord God, and though the Philistine be very strong, though his tread

seems to shake the earth, though his staff be as a weaver's beam, yet we shall, being nerved by the Holy One, strike him with a deadly stroke.—The battle is not ours, but God's.

"*There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.*"—1 SAM. xiv. 6.

Jonathan here takes a right view of the situation.—This is the view which all Christian workers and warriors must take, or they will certainly fail in the fight of life.—Beautiful is the picture that God enthroned in heaven is watching the battles which are being fought in his name, and is from hour to hour communicating strength, stimulus, inspiration to the hearts of those who go forth to war under his holy banner. —Whilst men look upon their swords as their weapons, God looks upon men as his instruments of war.—Soldiers fight with steel, God fights with living men: where the living men are full of the Spirit of God one counts for a thousand; numbers indeed are no longer calculated, it is courage, quality, strength of purpose, that is set down among the statistics of God's resources. God does not say, How many men have I on my side?—but, What is their quality?—Are Are they men full of faith and love?—they surcharged with the very Spirit of God?—Have they given up their minds to conquer or die in this tremendous conflict?—Some men are to be numbered, others should be weighed.—Now it is a question of arithmetical strength, and now it is a question of moral and spiritual force.—The Lord could save without any helpers; it is his condescension that accepts co-operation, not his necessity: we are honoured by being called upon to fight in God's cause: to wear his epaulettes, to wield his sword, to bear his shield,—this is the supreme honour of mortal man.—We cannot too frequently remind ourselves that life is not a luxury, but a battle; not a dream, but a fierce conflict, needing continual watchfulness and continual equipment.—"Take unto you the whole armour of God."—When you count up the statistics of the Church, and speak of thousands and tens of thousands of men, always remember that every number is small in relation to him who is infinite, and that however stupendous may be the resources placed at his disposal they are but so many ciphers until he stands at their head and transforms them into positive value. This is the hope and confidence of the Church. Statistics are all against us. Confucius has more followers than Jesus Christ. The Son of God is almost, indeed, the lowest on the poll of competitive saviours and teachers of the world. But our strength is not in ourselves; we believe in the living God, and that he will bring all things to pass which he has written in his book or uttered on his oath.—The promise is that the heathen shall be Christ's inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth his possession; and it is in the darkest hour, when the whole day is filled with storm, that faith is enabled to say, "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."—It is always well to place victory on the side of right, wisdom, truth.—It is comforting to know that conquest has no relation to mere brute strength or overwhelming numbers; moral problems are answered by moral means, and moral victories are won by moral weapons; to heaven we look for heaven's strength and heaven's benediction.

"*But he answered him not that day.*'—1 Sam. xiv. 37.

We are to think of silent days in providence.—Saul had taken counsel

of God, saying, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel?"—The question was very simple and direct, and yet it pleased God to regard the inquiry with apparent neglect.—This would be thought to be severe on the part of God in relation to Saul, if we ourselves had not passed through the same experience.—There are some days when we cannot pray; we are silent; we have no thoughts, no words, no feelings; for the time being we seem to be all but obliterated: at other times we can ask a hundred questions at heaven's door, and yet the door never opens,—yea, we can thunder our prayers, for we are in great enthusiasm of heart, and seem as if we could take the kingdom of heaven by violence; and yet heaven regards us with apparent indifference,—no gleam attests the attention of God, no opening in the clouds shows how near he is, no sound in the air proclaims his coming towards us.—We are to learn from silence as well as from eloquence.—There is an answer even in the silence, if we were wise enough to interpret it.—When Christ was told of the extremity of the poor sufferers in the house at Bethany he abode two days still in the same place where he was; we thought he would have hastened to shed the light of his blessing upon the circle which he loved, we supposed that nothing would detain him a single hour from the side of Martha and Mary; yet when he heard of their great suffering he paid no heed to it for the space of two days.—In the case before us, the Lord did not give Saul any answer on that particular day.—He is not moved by our impetuosity; he is not exposed to all the little tempests which come and go over the surface of our souls.—He teaches us by the education of patience, by a drill and discipline which affect the soul in its hours of intensest impetuosity.—We are not to suppose that God has abandoned the universe because he is taking a day of silence; we are not to infer that prayer is useless because no answer comes to it instantaneously.—Wait thou upon God: they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.—We have not yet realised all the meaning of the word "wait"; it is culture of patience, it is discipline of passion, it is control over all the affairs which agitate and distract the soul.—We may confidently say that if God comes not to-day he will come to-morrow, or the third day, and when he does come great will be the surprise with which he will gladden the soul by reason of the largeness of the blessing which he has been apparently withholding.

"*Thou shalt surely die, Jonathan*"—1 Sam. xiv. 44.

It is king Saul who speaks.—Saul, like most men, could be intensely conscientious at times.—Something had been done which had offended the king, and he proceeded to examine the people that he might know wherein the sin had been done, "For," said he, "as the Lord liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." Afterwards the lot was taken.—The lot fell between Saul and Jonathan; it was taken once more, and the lot fell upon Jonathan. "Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die."—Saul lifted himself up in great moral dignity and said, "God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan." These demonstrations of piety or of conscience are always to be guarded against.—Ostentatious obedience is very likely to be disobedience.—Many men make up for their neglect and even their sin in the ordinary courses of

life by doing exceptional things, which are intended to show how grand is their moral dignity.—Many a man will be neglectful at home, and yet on some anniversary day will attempt to do an action which is supposed to redeem the reputation or to cover all the neglect and cruelty of the whole year. Many a man will make himself obnoxious to the Church, and become quite a stumbling-block in the way of others, and, then in some fit of enthusiasm will give a large sum of money, or will do some deed that will excite attention and create amazement, and on the strength of that deed will relapse into his former undesirable and repulsive condition.—There is a technical consecration; there is a merely conventional piety that lives in ostentation, and that boasts of exceptional and heroic deeds; a piety that comes out once a year, or that appears biennially or septennially, and does a momentary wonder, and then relapses into the commonplace of selfishness and worldliness of soul.—Occasional bigness does but throw into the greater contrast habitual littleness.—When a man can be heroic upon occasion he forgets that he is proving that he can be heroic in the general tenor of his life if he so resolve. Sometimes our very greatest efforts are simply witnesses against us.—They are not taken in their isolation, but they are taken in their relation to our whole life, and they excite the inquiry, Why could not the man who did so great a deed to-day live a higher life than he is accustomed to live?—We cannot make up in one act for the neglect of a lifetime.—Piety is a daily consecration, a continual service, an hourly attention to things divine.

"*. . . when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him.*"—1 SAM. xiv. 52.

This should be the rule of the Church.—Does not the Church too often look out for feeble, quiet, timid, inoffensive men?—Is not negativeness of character a recommendation to the pulpit?—We hear of ministers being so inoffensive, harmless, quiet, as really not to excite any painful attention; and this is supposed to be a compliment to the ministers in question.—No such record is found in the New Testament.—Wherever Jesus Christ went a storm was created.—Of the apostles it was said, "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also."—"Inoffensive" is the last epithet that would have been applied to an apostle.—It does not follow that strong men or valiant men are to be noisy, demonstrative, or ostentatious; but it does mean that they are to be firm and clear in their testimony, resonant in their denunciation of wrong, and ever eloquent in their defence of that which is helpless and poor.—Strong men and valiant men should be pre-eminently in the Church.—The Church itself has become a controversial term because every one of its positions has been assailed, whether the position is doctrinal, ecclesiastical, or semi-political.—Under such stress of assault we need strong and valiant men to repulse the enemy, and keep in full repair the bulwarks of the Church.—There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a weak man may make a refuge of the pulpit.—Congregations know when a man is weak, and they soon leave him in full possession of his undesirable reputation.—A timid man in the Church not only does no good, he often does very serious harm.—He seems to be insincere, and there he may do himself unconscious injustice, for sincerity and tempestuousness of manner do not necessarily go together.—A man, however, must not only be sincere, he must appear to be sincere to those who are observing him; that is to say, he must be just to himself, and so give the full weight of his character and ability

to the side which he has espoused.—There is a common saying that the fool of the family is reserved for service in the Church; when Saul's maxim is worked upon that policy will soon be discovered to be not only an error in morals but a mistake in economical calculation.

"*And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned.*"—1 SAM. xv. 24.

Confession is necessary to forgiveness.—Before confession there must be consciousness in the man himself as to the nature of his transgression; that is to say, he must not merely use a form of words, but he must express a real and agonising contrition.—Saul does not reply to a merely technical argument; many men are willing to admit that they may be sinners in the letter; such confession goes no way towards the realisation of forgiveness; what is wanted is full, complete, earnest, unreserved confession, not of error and mistake or miscalculation, but of grievous iniquity—positive and absolute sin against God. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."—Man never appears to be more dignified than when speaking to God he confesses that he has no self-defence when charged by the Most High with the violation of law.—The very humiliation of the spectacle is the principal element in its moral dignity.—There is no dignity in defiance, in assumption, in self-exculpation; all processes of this kind add one falsehood to another, and crown the whole with intolerable vanity.—When we are weak, then are we strong; when we are humble, then are we about to be exalted; when we see the sin, point it out, confess it, and repudiate it, we are not far from the kingdom of God.—There is this distinction between technical and vital confession: a man may technically confess, and go out and repeat the sin: but when a man vitally confesses his iniquity, he by so much disqualifies himself for its repetition.—After confession we must wait for, pray for, a sense of divine forgiveness.—Saul not only confessed his sin, he said, "Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord."—The case of Saul shows us, however, that there may be a point when confession itself comes too late—too late, not for the world that is to come it may be, but for present rulership, influence, and high social advantage.—Samuel himself turned away from Saul, protesting that he would not return with him, and that his rejection of the Lord was a final act.—Samuel, however, on further remonstrance and expostulation "turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the Lord."—We are not to think that deposition from official position and honour necessarily means eternal exile from the presence and favour of God.—Let the worst take heart to believe that if he will now confess his sin God will show him the way to the Cross.

"*Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature.*"—1 SAM. xvi. 7.

Men are always doing this: hence they become the victims of appearances.—A man has only to be good-looking in order to win the confidence of many people; they think that so fair an exterior must represent an interior worthy of itself.—In the estimation of God height is nothing, formal beauty is nothing; the man is within and not without, and not until his spiritual qualities have been tested, can it be known what the man really is.—"The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."—Here is an irony which ought to be intolerable to us, namely, that there should be an infinite discrepancy between the outward appearance and

the heart: one would suppose that what a man was in his heart he would be also in his countenance. The poet has told us of a villain with a smiling cheek, "a goodly apple rotten at the core."—When the work of Christ is done in the soul, the result will report itself in the face and manner and voice, in every uplifting of the hand, and in every expression of the eye.—There may not indeed be formal beauty, but there will be an expression which testifies as to the indwelling and the inworking of God.—Many men hold their places in society to-day, simply because they are of fair countenance or of lofty stature.—Time is against all such men; events are never finally in their favour; there comes a period when merely formal beauty is dismantled, and moral ghastliness is revealed in all its reality and sadness; there comes also a time when the despised and rejected, men without form and comeliness, show that they have beauty of heart, dignity of mind, and that they belong to the very aristocracy of heaven.

'*Is there not a cause?*"—1 SAM. xvii. 29.

Yet the man himself may not be able to explain it.—We have seen again and again that it is possible even for rational men to be unable to give reasons for certain parts of their conduct.—There is an inworking mystery, a subtle mysterious action of mind upon mind, spirit upon spirit, leading to results which cannot be accounted for by logical processes.—On the other hand, we must guard ourselves against the mastery of mere impulse, never supposing that because we feel impelled in a certain direction therefore the direction is right.—We should not forget the art and the duty of self-analysis, and if ever we find that obedience to an impulse results to our material advantage, then we are entitled to suspect the inspiration of that impulse.—When an impulse carries a man away to become a missionary, a hero, a subject of personal sacrifice; when it inflicts upon him great inconvenience, disadvantage, and even loss; when it drags him forth to a place called Golgotha; we may begin to feel that he is in reality following an impulse other than human.—We are not to walk in the line of our inclination, which is always a treacherous course, but to walk in that line which involves great self-denial, and an increasing sense of the necessity of absolute dependence upon the living God.

"*Where are Samuel and David?*"—1 SAM. xix. 22.

A time comes when we ask for old friends and guides.—Whilst they are with us we are apt to under-estimate our need of them and their influence upon us.—Sometimes our old friends are sought for purposes of revenge, as Saul in this case sought for David.—The passage may be used however for the purpose of exciting our thoughts in the direction of inquiry for old kings, and old prophets, and old friends, who have ruled over our spirits, influenced our lives, and ennobled the whole level of our being.—The time will come when there will be no answers to such questions.—The prophets die, the fathers are withdrawn by death, the most venerable ministries cease their action upon the mind.—Whilst our opportunities endure, let us avail ourselves of them to the utmost extent.—Gratitude to the teacher will enable that teacher to be more effective in his ministry.—There will come a time when our riches will be in our recollections; we shall think of the men we have known, of the hearts with which we have communed, of the gentle and mighty ministries that have operated upon our thought and feeling; we shall be able to recall the great,

who from their urns still rule and direct our spirits.—Blessed will he be who in old age can construct a whole gallery of living portraits on which he can gaze with admiration, and affection, and gratitude.—Pictures of this kind lie within the reach of the poorest.—All men are not able to buy canvas, and art, and gilded frames, but the poorest soul can cherish its memories, and live upon them in such a way as to make solitude impossible, and thanklessness a sin.—We never can be so indebted to any man as to the religious teacher.—This is difficult to realise when all things are flourishing around us, though we may come to its recognition when the sky darkens, when the day dips towards evening, and when all our lights are going out.

"... *David's place was empty.*"—1 SAM. xx. 25.

After describing the local circumstances under which this expression is found, apply it to vacancies at the Lord's table, or to empty places in the sanctuary itself.—How many empty places there are there as a fact!—He is not a wise Church statesman who ignores facts, however melancholy and depressing they may be.—Probably a correct view of the Church attendance of to-day would discover that there are more persons out of Church than in it.—We must not be afraid of the charge of pessimism,—that is, of looking upon the blackest side of all things, and foreboding the most disagreeable issues.—First and foremost, let us get at facts and realities, for until we know them in all their magnitude and blackness we cannot address ourselves to remedial measures with any certain and permanent effect.—Some are present at the Lord's table who ought to be absent, because their hearts are not right before God; not only are their hearts not right, but their supreme wish does not lie in the right direction,—they are selfish, worldly, unspiritual men, who are present in the sanctuary by custom, or association, or other circumstance, which does not touch the vitality of Christian profession.—Parents are absent, and are mourned by children.—Children are absent, and their absence occasions great heart-yearning on the part of parents.—The old wonder that the young do not assemble in greater force at Christian gatherings.—Is the philosopher absent?—the wise man? the rich man?—the man of abounding prosperity, who has never known the agony of heart-ache, or the darkness of a clouded prospect?—The pastor's eye should always be on the out-look alike for attendance and non-attendance, and whilst he speaks of vacant places he ought to encourage himself by the fact that many places are not vacant.—Let every man ask himself why his place is empty.—If the reason is a good one, then the man himself is in spirit in the very sanctuary from which his body is absent, and his privacy should be accounted to God as an opportunity for great bestowment of blessing.—Everything depends upon the reason of the vacancy.—"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." If we forsake God's house, what if our house be forsaken of God?—There ought to be a place for every man in the sanctuary; so to say, a home-place, one which he can call his own, one which is identified with his presence and influence.—What is it to have a name anywhere and everywhere except in the only place which shall abide for ever?—Who would write his name with fading blossoms when he can write it with eternal stars?—Bodily presence amounts to nothing in the sanctuary unless the heart be also there.—God is a Spirit, and he looks for the attendance of spirits.

VARIED TREATMENT.

"... *David's place was empty.*"—1 SAM. xx. 25.

I. Some absent who might be expected to be present.—(*a*) Children of good parents.—(*b*) Those who have long been hearers of the word.—(*c*) Those who have proved the vanity of the world for themselves.

II. Some apparently absent who are really present.—(*a*) The timorous and fearful.—(*b*) Those whose love is greater than their hope.

III. Some present who ought to be absent.—(*a*) Hypocrites.—(*b*) Schemers.

IV. Some absent on the most frivolous excuses.—(*a*) Nothing worth hearing.—(*b*) Inconsistencies of other people.

Application.—(*a*) Are we afflicted by such absences? (*b*) How far are we responsible for them?—(*c*) The work of the Church is not done so long as there is one absentee!

"*But the lad knew not any thing.*"—1 SAM. xx. 39.

A sentence of this kind leads us to think of the unconscious ministries of life.—"The "little lad" supposed that he was simply finding out arrows which were shot by Jonathan.—May we not be doing work of this kind, and supposing all the time that we are occupied only with frivolous engagements?—As a matter of fact we know very little about the mystery of life.—In running an errand we may be carrying a gospel.—In sitting in a sick chamber we may be connecting that room of dreariness and solitude with the very precincts of heaven itself.—God sends us upon errands which look trivial; we suppose that we are almost wasting our time; we think that men of our abilities might be more profitably employed; let us be rebuked by the incident before us, for no man can really tell the issue of his simplest transactions.—We are set for signs and tokens to other people.—We know not what inferences are being drawn from our conduct.—Again and again it is said that if such and such a man take such and such a course this or that will be the issue.—The man in question is utterly ignorant of all the reasoning that is proceeding respecting his movements.—Who can tell how we are watched by the angels? are they not all ministering spirits? Who knows the concealments of life: who may be in hiding places watching our conduct, what detectives may be upon our track, what traps may be set for our capture and overthrow?—We are watched for evil as well as for good, for good as well as for evil.—We say, What can it matter whether we go a few yards further, or a few yards shorter?—Everything may depend even upon so trivial an incident as that.—How marvellously a man's destiny is sometimes indicated.—If a feather will tell how the wind blows, the accident of a moment, as we call accident, may show us the course of our whole future upon earth.—Never despise the least services, for we know not with what benefactions they may be charged to others.

"... *detained before the Lord.*"—1 SAM. xxi. 7.

Such words are to be used simply by way of accommodation, either for private meditation or for public preaching.—There is a detention before the Lord that amounts to imprisonment, the accused having a sense of being arrested and charged at the bar of heaven.—Men are detained before the Lord in various ways, as, for example, (*a*) by conscience,—when some moral charge presses its claim upon us; (*b*) by gratitude,—when we stand in the act

of counting the divine mercies we have received, and numbering the divine blessings which surround us, our hearts all the while overflowing with a sense of thankfulness to the Giver of all good; (*c*) by religious contemplation,—when wonder is excited at the greatness of the universe, when amazement seizes the mind because of the minuteness and beneficence of providence, when events so shape themselves as to prove superior to human direction, and yet to be tending in a course filled with blessedness to the human family; (*d*) by loving and exultant devotion,—as when the heart is bowed down with pure emotion, and the soul is lifted up in high and unselfish expectation because of the conscious nearness of God and his evident willingness to create for himself an opportunity in our life that he may enlarge all his former gifts in one supreme blessing.—Then there is a detention before the Lord that involves the exercise of patience; we do not get an answer so soon as we want it; we think we have an urgent petition, demanding an instantaneous reply, and yet we are kept waiting day by day.—Who can tell the meaning of all these detentions?—Blessed are they who are detained before God because the Lord has much to say to them in the way of instruction, comfort, and stimulus.—Who has not felt the words rising to his lips in many an hour of glowing realisation of the divine presence—"Abide with us"?

". . . *the king's business required haste.*"—1 SAM. xxi. 8.

This is another instance in which the expositor can only proceed by way of accommodation.—The accommodation, however, is full of suggestion of a most practical and useful nature.—We are always called upon to work as if we had but one day to work in:—"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."—Whatever we can do let us do it now.—There is no to-morrow in the life of a Christian who is fully consecrated to the service of his Lord; every day is the last day, every coming day is the day of judgment, the judge always standeth at the door.—How many things we are going to do by-and-by!—We have no right to talk so, for our breath is in our nostrils.—This is a boasting of to-morrow that is forbidden by the Holy Ghost.—If we have a gospel to carry we must carry it instantly, or the man for whom it is designed may die.—If we have any revelation to declare we must lose no time in the declaration, or we may lose our ability to reveal the message with which God has entrusted us.—Such impetuosity need not involve carelessness.—The impetuosity that is useful is also earnest.—Sometimes men hasten slowly, and therefore hasten the more.—The most deliberate things are to be done with the intensest earnestness, and the intensest earnestness is never to allow itself to be deprived of the advantage and utility of the highest spiritual dignity.—When the king's business relates to the salvation of souls, who dare say there is a moment to be lost?—Are men prodigal of time who are called to extinguish a conflagration?—Do men proceed at leisure when the swimmer is struggling with the billows and may at any moment be lost?—We should be urged by the necessity of others, and not merely impelled by our own sense of the fitness of things.—Where there is need there is a call for help, and need always calls not for remote but for immediate assistance.—In all things let us hear the voice of the Saviour saying, "That thou doest, do quickly,"—whether it be prayer, or gift, or offer of sympathy, or proclamation of the gospel; the next

moment may be the last; therefore fill the present breathing space with all faithful action.

"*Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds?*"—1 SAM. xxiii. 19.

A useful spiritual application of these words instantly suggests itself; still we are simply on the ground of accommodation, and not on the ground of critical exposition.—The great spiritual lesson is that the good man is always hidden in a stronghold.—"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."—We are to be hidden in the Rock of Ages.—We are not protected merely by the shadow of some perishing substance; we are hidden under the wings of the Almighty.—The Lord is our shield and buckler, our sword and our invincible defence.—There are strongholds of faith, reason, experience; there are strongholds of history, of general testimony on the part of Christian believers, and above all in our own consciousness of the divine nearness and the divine ministry in our personal life.—We know in whom we have believed, and we know that he is able to keep that which we have committed to his charge.—It is in no poor hut that the Christian lives, but in the very centre of the pavilion of God.—Our citizenship is in heaven: we seek a country out of sight: we have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of.—They who take the soul of the Christian captive must first overcome the Almightiness which guards it.—Being assured that we are in a stronghold, let us be cautious how we adventure out of it.—Imagination may tempt us, speculation may promise us glittering rewards, foolish friends may implore us to come away and to range the larger country and increase our experience of life and nature: all these temptations may be addressed to us without any purpose of mischief: we should therefore know ourselves as to realise our weakness, and so far be assured of our need of divine help as never to go beyond the limit which God has imposed upon us.—Let the soul say morning by morning, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help: my help cometh even from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth."—We can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us.—Our sufficiency is of God.—All these promises are full of sacred and tender comfort, and were written not to be looked upon with the eye of the body only but to be gazed upon with the vision of the soul, until all that is most beautiful in them passes into the spirit and becomes part of our manhood.—Whenever the enemy rises against us may we remember that we are hidden in a stronghold; may we never live so loosely and vainly as to give that enemy the impression that we can be found wandering alone in any place at any hour; may our steadfastness and our zeal be such that we shall be found evermore within the sacred and impregnable enclosure of the divine sovereignty and protection.

"*Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses.*"—1 Sam. xxv. 18.

All this was done to propitiate a man. Some rule of courtesy had been violated, and the wife of the reckless violator undertook to make amends. We may be more careful about etiquette than we are about righteousness. It is possible to be more anxious to placate a human enemy than to assure God of our penitence and contrition because of our

violation of his law.—There is a kind of natural religion whose instincts should teach us a good deal about the higher piety.—When we have committed a trespass against human law natural religion urges us to confession, amendment, and reparation: ought we not to carry the teaching of that instinct still higher, and to reason with ourselves that if we have broken the law of God we should go in humblest attitude before him and with a broken heart seek his forgiveness?—The danger is lest the light that is in us be darkness, and then how great is the density of that gloom! We know what to do to one another, and yet we know not what to do to Almighty God.—We have kept our ceremonial life clear of all blame, and yet our spiritual life may be filled with all the mischief of disobedience and rebellion.—In going to God we need not make all this large preparation; we take nothing in our hand, we bring no price along with us; we simply cling to him who is our Surety, our Defence, our Propitiation.—Still the same principle is involved in both cases.—In the one case there has been human neglect to a human king; in the other there has been human disobedience to a divine Lord; in both cases there must be a sense of neglect or wrong-doing, and in both cases the offended must be placated by some action on our part.—The Lord has no need of sacrifices of our making; he asks not that we should serve him by outward decorum or buy his pardon with gifts of gold: we are called upon to avail ourselves of the mystery of Christ's priesthood, and to find in Christ the answer to every charge as to a broken law. We bring most when we bring nothing. All we are required to bring is a broken heart, and faith in him who died that our sins might be forgiven.—This is a great mystery.—There is nothing here that appeals to vanity, or that elicits from us a display of those ostentations which delight the fancy and dazzle the public: we are to be shut up with God in the privacy of unknown and unheard of communion, and in that holy secrecy we are to receive the blessing which comes from the eternal Christ alone.

SELECTED NOTES.

The Books of Samuel.—These two books were anciently reckoned as one, the present division being derived from the Septuagint and Vulgate. In those versions they are called the first and second Books of Kings, as they form part of the history of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

The question of the authorship of the books is not free from difficulty; but the decided preponderance of evidence is in favour of the ancient view, that Samuel wrote 1 Sam. i.-xxiv. and that the rest was written by Nathan and Gad (1 Chron. xxix. 29). The authenticity of the history found in the Books of Samuel rests on sufficient grounds. Portions of them are quoted in the New Testament (2 Sam. vii. 14 in Heb. i. 5; 1 Sam. xiii. 14 in Acts xiii. 22). References to them occur in other sections of Scripture, especially in the Psalms, to which they often afford historic illustrations.

The contents of the Books of Samuel belong to an interesting period of Jewish history. The preceding Book of Judges refers to the affairs of the

republic as they were administered after the conquest, when the nation was all but a congeries of independent cantons, sometimes partially united for a season under an extraordinary dictator. As, however, the form of government was changed, and remained monarchical till the overthrow of the kingdom, it was of national importance to note the time, method, and means of the alteration. This change happening under the regency of the wisest and best of their sages, his life became a topic of interest. The first Book of Samuel gives an account of his birth and early call to the duties of a seer under Eli's pontificate; describes the low and degraded condition of the people, oppressed by foreign enemies; proceeds to narrate the inauguration of Samuel as judge; his prosperous regency; the degeneracy of his sons; the clamour for a change in the civil constitution; the installation of Saul; his rash and reckless character; and his neglect of, or opposition to, the theocratic elements of the government. The historian goes on to relate God's choice of David as king; his aberrations from the path of duty; the unnatural rebellion of his son Absalom and its suppression; his carrying into effect a military census of his dominions, and the divine punishment which this act incurred. The second Book of Samuel, while it relates the last words of David, yet stops short of his death. As David was the real founder of the monarchy and reorganiser of the religious worship; the great hero, legislator, and poet of his country; as his dynasty maintained itself on the throne of Judah till the Babylonian captivity—it is not a matter of wonder that the description of his life and government occupies so large a portion of early Jewish history. The Books of Samuel thus consist of three interlaced biographies—those of Samuel, Saul, and David.

The design of these books is not very different from that of the other historical treatises of the Old Testament. The Books of Kings are a history of the nation as a theocracy; those of Chronicles have special reference to the form and ministry of the religious worship, as bearing upon its re-establishment after the return from Babylon. Samuel is more biographical, yet the theocratic element of the government is not overlooked. It is distinctly brought to view in the early chapters concerning Eli and his house, and the fortunes of the ark; in the passages which describe the change of the constitution; in the blessing which rested on the house of Obed-Edom; in the curse which fell on the Bethshemites, and Uzzah and Saul, for intrusive interference with holy things. The book shows clearly that God was a jealous God; that obedience to him secured felicity; that the nation sinned in seeking another king; that Saul's special iniquity was his impious oblivion of his station as Jehovah's vicegerent, for he contemned the prophets and slew the priesthood; and that David owed his prosperity to his careful culture of the central principle of the Hebrew Government.

THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always consecrating men to thy service. Thine is a call to every man to come up higher. Thou dost daily enlarge our capacity, and enlarge our opportunity, and bring to bear upon us the inspiration of new experience of grace and new consciousness of power. Thou dost make the priest. We are a royal priesthood. Thou hast made us kings and priests unto others. Thou didst turn the dust into man, and man into the priest; and thou wilt fill all heaven with thy chosen ones, clothing them with the white linen of the saints and setting upon their heads crowns of gold. Whatever we see of thy providence enlarges our conception of thy goodness. We cannot measure thy purpose, any more than we can measure thy firmament. It is full of grace, it burns with glory, it is like thyself in every quality. May we fall into its march, be taken up into the music of its progress and be enabled to understand that we are not atoms without a centre, children without a home, worlds without a central fire. We are grouped around God, related to the one throne, shepherded by the one Pastor, and regarded with infinite vigilance by the one Overseer. Let this comforting truth come into our hearts as long-expected rain softens the hardened earth. Thus shall we become comforted, fertilised, wondrously refreshed, and like slaves who have slipped off their chains and left them behind never more to be resumed, we shall pass upward into the light and enjoy the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Let thy word speak to us now. May every man feel himself at the altar receiving tokens and pledges of consecration so that when we leave the house we may take with us the robe of thy righteousness, garments of ineffable beauty, being clothed upon with the Lord Jesus, who is our one Priest and only Saviour. Amen.

2 Samuel i.

"The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!" (v. 19).

"How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" (v. 27).

DAVID'S LAMENT OVER SAUL.

FROM what we have learned of the relations subsisting between David and Saul, we should have expected a song of triumph rather than a song of lamentation, over the death of

the king. For a long time there had been no kindness in Saul in relation to David. He had pursued him malignantly, and had not sought to conceal the bitterness and determination of his hatred. Twice, indeed, as we have seen, the better nature of Saul momentarily disclosed itself, but the disclosure was too impulsive not to be transient. Now that the great king lies in ruins in Mount Gilboa, what is the feeling of the man against whom his sword was directed? Is it a feeling of relief? Is it a feeling of triumph? Is it a feeling of selfish congratulation? The answer is in the pathos of the text. David lamented the king's death, and was sad with genuine and noble sorrow. There are events in life which make the commonest men almost sublime: how much more do such events elevate the princeliest men until they sing as angels or burn as seraphs? David's life has up to this point charmed us by its simplicity and heroism: to-day we see it in its highest mood of veneration and magnanimity. Suppose we had for the first time opened the book at the chapter containing this lament, what would have been our impression? Reading the lament, without knowing the history which preceded it, we should undoubtedly have said, David has lost in Saul the tenderest of his friends and the wisest of his counsellors; his heart has been impoverished; the light which he viewed as a lamp from heaven has been suddenly put out. This inference would be forced upon us. When, however, we read the lament first, and then go back page after page through the history, we find the discrepancy widening verse by verse until it becomes a literary, if not a moral contradiction.

Let us gather such lessons as we may be able to find,—having special regard to those which bear upon ourselves and upon all generations of mankind.

I. One of the first lessons impressed upon us by this lament relates to David's noble-minded forgetfulness of all personal injury. Observe what the song might have been! There might not have been any song: David might have received the news of Saul's death with significant silence. Do not some of us cherish the memory of our personal injuries, even after death has dug the awful gulf of the grave between the present and the past? Understand we are not expected to call the evil good,

or the good evil. Death is not to obliterate moral distinctions; but why should we judge when the man who injured us has passed on to the dread invisible,—the very seat of the Just One?

II. The lament shows how David was enabled to take the highest and brightest view of human character. He did not detract from the valour of Saul. He might have done so. He did not under-value what Saul had done for Israel: "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel." David called the nation to mourn. He gave a limpse, too, of the happy relations which prevailingly subsisted between Saul and Jonathan: they "were lovely and pleasant in their lives." We know an exception or two, but David's knowledge was extensive and minute. Men may be better at home than on the battle-field, or in the strife of politics. Most people, surely, have some sunny spot upon their character! Observe that David did not reserve his praise of Saul until after Saul's death. There is not one word in the lament which is not sustained by the speech and action of David throughout his connection with Saul. Some people delay their praise too long. They keep back their affection until they have to suggest an epitaph. Make your love longer, even if you make your epitaphs shorter.

III. The lament impresses us with the beauty of a zealous and tender care for the reputation of the Lord's anointed. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph." David did not proceed on the assumption that it was of no consequence what was said about a dead man. The man now dead had been anointed with oil. Saul had been king of Israel; let him be honoured even in death! The lesson is most delicate, and undoubtedly far-reaching. Death is not the only fall. Men fall morally. The mighty men of the church fall like stars from heaven. The great preacher becomes a debauchee. The trusted professor is caught in fraud. The feet of the strong are tripped up. And there are men who delight in telling these things in Gath and Askelon! There

were cowardly men who could come and abuse the dead body of Saul, who dare not have met him in battle! Look at the jackdaws hopping round the dead eagle! See the hungry whelps opening their ravenous mouths upon the dead lion! Is there anything more wicked than the joy felt when gloating over the fall of a good man? Some people do not wait for the actual fall: they cannot repress their delight when a good man stumbles, even for a moment. How eagerly do they report the slip! How sneeringly do they taunt the offender! "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

IV. The lament shows how bitter is the distress which follows the irreparable losses of life. "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Yet on earth David and Jonathan would meet never more! We do not always give full value to the positive side of life. We hold advantages and blessings as if we had a right to them. It is so in the very commonest things. It is so in nature: in family life: in church relations: sunshine; water; bread; friendship; ministry. Is it a small thing to lose a man who understands your heart? Through human sympathy do we not see far into divine compassion? Every moment we are exposed to the possibility of irreparable loss! [The lessons suggested by this fact: appreciation, kindness, forbearance, etc.]

The application of the whole: (1) Let us so live, that death will be but a momentary separation. (2) In commending the wonderful love of Jonathan, let us remember that there is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

"Art thou weary, art thou languid,
Art thou sore distrest?
'Come to Me,' saith One, 'and coming,
Be at rest!'"

PRAYER.

Hold us in the hollow of thine hand, we humbly pray thee, Father of our spirits and God of all grace. They only are kept who are kept by God. Hide us in thy pavilion from the strife of tongues; hide us in thine almightiness from the assaults of every foe. How are the mighty fallen! But thou dost deplore a greater fall; thine heart is moved towards thy people, because thou hast nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against thee. Forbid that we should shed our tears only over historical falls; may each man remember that he too may fall and droop and die. Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe, is the cry of every broken heart. Keep us, and we shall not stray; love us, and mightily restrain us by all the ministry that can guard human character from apostasy, and we yet shall be saved. Give hope to those who are in great sorrow of heart because of fear and apprehension concerning their ability to finish the race and to receive the crown. They wonder how the strife will end; sometimes their hearts whisper to them, Give it up; it can end only in ruin: why prolong the agony? Then thy Spirit whispers a gospel from heaven, saying, Strive on; withstand in the evil day; take unto thee the whole armour of God; hope continually in heaven. Thus is the life of man a great strife and contradiction—now right, now wrong; now glowing like the day, now dark and troubled as a night of storm. Thou knowest our frame; thou knowest everything about us, and thou wilt command thy blessing to rest upon us according to our speciality and our need. Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour, was in all points tempted like as we are: he was taken to the pinnacle of the temple, and to the exceeding great and high mountain, and it seemed to us as though we could not have stood where he retained his integrity. He will help us; he is able to save unto the uttermost; he is our priest, our intercessor, our paraclete; we put our trust in him. Hide us till the storm of life be past. May we be able to finish our course with joy. Save us from bringing upon thy name that which men may account a scandal. Enable us to live wisely, nobly, usefully. This we can only do by thy grace, thou living One; this alone is possible within the circle of the cross. Spirit of the living God, be our guard and guide while life shall last. Amen.

2 Samuel ii.

1. And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord [through the high priest Abiathar], saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron [long the residence of Abraham].

2. So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite.

3. And his [six hundred] men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.

4. And the men of Judah came, and there they [publicly] anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul. [Jabesh-gilead had been destroyed in the civil war against the tribe of Benjamin.]

5. ¶ And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him.

6. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness [*lit.* I also will shew you this good], because ye have done this thing.

7. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.

8. ¶ But Abner [the cousin-german of Saul] the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim [famous in the history of Jacob: on the east of the Jordan, and not far from the brook Jabbok];

9. And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.

10. Ish-bosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.

11. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

12. ¶ And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon [five and a half miles north-west of Jerusalem].

13. And Joab the son of Zeruiah [Zeruiah was David's sister], and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon [the ruins of this tank or reservoir yet remain, about 120 feet long and 100 broad]: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.

14. And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise.

15. Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which

pertained to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David.

16. And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim [the field of sharp edges], which is in Gibeon.

17. And there was a very sore battle that day [nineteen slain on David's side, and 360 on the side of Israel]; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.

18. ¶ And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe.

19. And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.

20. Then Abner looked behind him, and said, Art thou Asahel? And he answered, I am.

21. And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour. But Asahel would not turn aside from following of him.

22. And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?

23. Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib [abdomen], that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still.

24. Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon.

25. ¶ And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of an hill.

26. Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?

27. And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother.

28. So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more [in that campaign].

29. And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain, and passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and they came to Mahanaim.

30. And Joab returned [to Gibeon, where he rallied his men, and buried the dead] from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel.

31. But the servants of David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men so that three hundred and threescore men died.

32. ¶ And they took up Asahel [nearly related to David], and buried him in the sepulchre of his father, which was in Beth-lehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at break of day [the distance from Bethlehem to Hebron was about thirteen miles].

2 Samuel iii.

1. Now there was long war [not actual fighting but a hostile and military temper] between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker [Providence works through time].

2. ¶ And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his first-born was Amnon [see chap. xiii.], of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess;

3. And his second, Chileab [supposed to have died early], of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom [see chaps. xiii.–xviii.] the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;

4. And the fourth, Adonijah [put to death by Solomon (1 Kings xi. 25)] the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;

5. And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. [It is quite in the manner of the sacred historians to give such statistics about the house or family of the king.]

6. ¶ And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.

7. And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah [see chap. xxi. 8–11], the daughter of Aiah: and Ish-bosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?

8. Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ish-bosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head, which against Judah [*lit.* Am I a dog's head belonging to Judah?] do shew kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to-day with a fault concerning this woman?

9. So do God to Abner, and more also [for he now saw the utter and contemptible weakness of Ish-bosheth], except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him ;

10. To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beer-sheba.

11. And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him.

12. ¶ And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land ? saying also, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee.

13. ¶ And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee : but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face. ["Besides the justice of this demand—Michal having been wrongfully taken from him by Saul—and besides all question of affection towards one who had loved him and saved his life (1 Sam. xviii. 20 ; xix. 11–17), there were political reasons of importance for the demand. The demand itself shewed that he bore no malice against the house of Saul, and the restoration would again constitute him Saul's son-in-law, and thus further his claims to the throne ; while it also shewed publicly that he was in a condition to enforce his rights as against the house of Saul."]

14. And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines.

15. And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish.

16. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim [on the road from the Mount of Olives to the Jordan valley]. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned.

17. And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you :

18. Now then do it : for the Lord hath spoken of David [an unrecorded utterance], saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies.

19. And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin [with whom careful negotiations were always made] : and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin.

20. So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty [representative] men

with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast [not convivial but sacrificial].

21. And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace.

22. ¶ And, behold, the servants of David and Joab came from pursuing a troop, and brought in a great spoil with them: but Abner was not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace.

23. When Joab and all the host that was with him were come, they told Joab, saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace.

24. Then Joab came to the king, and said [in the tone of a rough remonstrance], What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? [an inquiry inspired by suspicion].

25. Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest.

26. And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah [two and a half miles from Hebron]: but David knew it not [yet the messengers might have used his name].

27. And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate [customary place of conference in the east] to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib [abdomen must always be understood], that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother [but more from jealousy].

28. ¶ And afterwards when David heard it, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner:

29. Let it rest on the head of Joab [who was not the Goel, or lawful Avenger], and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff [a person unfit for war], or that falleth on [by] the sword, or that lacketh bread.

30. So Joab and Abishai his brother slew [denoting violence] Abner, because he had slain [had put to death] their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.

31. ¶ And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and [publicly] mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier.

32. And they buried Abner in Hebron [in the royal city]: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept.

33. And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?

34. Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. ["Abner, so valiant in war, with his hands free for defence, with his feet unfettered, unsuspicious of evil, fell by the treacherous act of a wicked man."] And all the people wept again over him.

35. And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or aught else, till the sun be down.

36. And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.

37. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner.

38. And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?

39. And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.

DAVID'S MAGNANIMITY.

DAVID will rejoice now that he sees his great foe is dead, or he will otherwise show the true quality of his life and character and purpose. The man who wrote this mighty lament, —this thunderstorm turned into tears,—was not a man who could afterwards write vindictive psalms. This lament is the key of his character. He will speak strongly, for he must speak strongly, if he speak at all. But understand that in this lament we have the secret and standard of his character. He is never so near breaking down in tears as when he is in a great tempest of wrath. Sometimes we hardly know how the paroxysm will end; but it always ends in some grand religious exclamation, some psalm of confidence in the living God. To prove this we must go over the history. The principal line in the narrative of these chapters

points in the direction of David's magnanimity. In no single line does he play the little man. He is strong in his weakness. We shall see at the conclusion how weak he was—bent down because the burden was too strong for him, and yet still bent only as a true king can bend. The Philistines had overpowered Saul, first slaying Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's son. That was hard enough. History suffers a great impoverishment when a man like Jonathan is taken out of it as an active presence; true, a new and celestial odour fills the pages of memory, but when Jonathan is removed actively, who can fill up the void?

A beautiful thing it is so to live that nobody can succeed us easily, as if the gap were a very small one, a mere handbreadth. We do not know how much space some men have filled until they are dead: then we find that it may take some ten or twenty men to fill up the vacancy and to do all the work, because so much of it was hidden: it was a work of influence, inspiration, stimulus, comfort,—the kind of work that cannot be scheduled and set forth before the critical eye in plain figures and common estimates. But the worst is to come. The archers were hard upon Saul himself; he was sore wounded, and then he fell upon his sword and died. Many a wound was gaping in the flesh of king Saul. He would be killed; he would fall upon his sword; he would not have the last stroke dealt by a Philistinian hand if he could possibly help it: he would do otherwise. A noble pride comes up even in this last agony. Here is a test of his quality which we might not have suspected. Yet, on the other hand, why should he care how he died? He had seen views of life which are not granted to ordinary experience. He began "to peep," as the poet says—"to peep into glory." He had begun to see somewhat of destiny, to feel the awfulness and grandeur of life, and the sacredness of a divine anointing.

We have seen how the king died. Now David comes to the front more than ever. He went unto Hebron under divine protection—"and the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah." And then for some motive or other, not altogether clear, they tell him that the men of Jabesh-gilead were the men that buried Saul. Why did they

communicate that information to king David? Did they want to please the king? Or to create for the king an opportunity to avenge himself upon a hostile people? It is difficult to find the motive of all the actions of men, but we shall see David's action in reply to the information :—

"And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them" (ii. 5–7).

Where is the vindictiveness? Where is there one note of evil triumph and glory? Why did not king David go out and slay the men of Jabesh-gilead and bury them in the dishonoured grave of a discrowned king? Is this the man to write imprecatory psalms—psalms toned to the evil music of the worst wickedness? Is this the man to spend his after days in writing poetry of iniquity? We must have misunderstood him if we have thought there was anything meanly and narrowly personal in his imprecations; there must be some deeper meaning than this: otherwise David, a mightier man than Saul, fell infinitely more deeply. But the lesson to us comes in the form of a question: How much further than this have we advanced? We speak in somewhat of a tone of patronage of Old Testament saints—men who "lived in the twilight," who were "not permitted to see the full blaze of gospel day." Historically the comment is true, but regarding this action of David as a standard, how do we measure ourselves? Could we have done this? When our enemies die, what is our inmost feeling? Is there not an unuttered sense of thankfulness and relief? Do we visit their graves and bedew them with tears? Do we listen with delight to a recital of their virtues? Do we become their encomiasts? Let us not fear these lance-questions; let them pierce us till the blood comes. Our boasting is great as to our historical position: we live in the Christian centuries; the whole heaven is flooded with Christian light, the whole air vibrates with evangelical music,—what about our spirit, the reality of our heart's desire? Who can compare with David? Who so great, so magnanimous? Surely he is in a great

lineage: what if after this there shall arise a Man unlike all other men, who shall be hailed and blessed and worshipped as "the Son of David"?

Now another enemy arises. David was educated in the school of hostility. The experience of David was enough to make a poet of him, if the divine faculty were slumbering within him. Sorrow oftentimes makes us take the harp down as well as hang it up; sometimes we can have no comfort but in the harp; if the Gospel is to come to us at all it must come through the medium of music. The next enemy is Abner. "Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David" (iii. 1), not open standing battles: for such conflicts we can prepare ourselves. The "long war" was not a succession of fights in the open field, but vexatious war, hostility in which there was no possibility of renown: the little mischievous fretful chafing wars which make life so rough. When Saul spake he was misunderstood; when David spake he was misunderstood: the people on both sides did everything they could to irritate one another. That is the meaning of the long war; and this course of petty vexation was varied by open battle, great conflict and clash of arms. The leader of the host of Israel was Abner. He was inspired by the spirit of opposition. He was the hope of the followers of Saul. Not a man to be closely looked into, from a moral point of view. In the very height of his pride, in the very boasting of his strength, Ish-bosheth brought him to the ground. Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, charged Abner with an evil deed. He put the thing before him in plain words. Let us have no hinted accusations. Men cannot answer such impeachments. Ish-bosheth put the case before Abner in terms that could not be misundertood, and Abner, like many a hard-hearted hypocrite, started into indignant self-defence, and asked if he was "a dog's head" which could do the thing that was charged upon him, and sought to shut the mouth of Abner by telling him what he, Abner, had done for the house of Saul, saying in effect: You ought to be the last man to speak; seeing what I have done for the house of Saul you should let my conduct go without criticism or hostile comment. So Abner would no longer play the part of enemy to David. He said he would leave the cause of Israel.

Is there any counterpart of this in our day? He said he would have no longer anything to do with the house that could treat him so in the person of its most conspicuous representative. So he left the cause. How very frail is the link that binds us to some causes! How soon our most faithful friends may become detached! But who can trust the man who will leave on such a ground as Abner indicated? If we are really bound to any cause, it should not be in the power of any man, bring what charge he may, to shake us from our purpose, or to break us in the completeness of our homage. The Christian cause is continually exposed to this kind of impoverishment. Men will flee from the Church on any pretence. We need not await the time when we can bring against them, even in the form of an inquiry, some desperate accusation: a little offence will do it; a small disappointment will sunder the connection, which consisted not of the very heart, and show that the love was only a conscious or unconscious pretence.

Abner had to undergo very severe criticism, but nevertheless very just. There was a follower of David, a servant, really a nephew, who had a head as long as Iscariot's; a desperate man; nothing could drive him from his purpose. When Abner came to David and said, I will now be upon your side if you please, David made him a feast. Joab would have made him no banquet. When Joab heard of it he said, with a nephew's license, "What hast thou done? Behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone?"—he should have been lying here, weltering in his blood; thou hast been taken in again; thou art king, and I am but thy nephew, servant, but I am amazed at this want of sagacity: the enemy was within the gate, and might never have left. Joab was not content with words only. "When Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother" (iii. 27). The king was the great man; the servant was the inferior man. It is true that Abner had done many a wicked deed, true that he was an enemy of the crown and throne of David. Now that he is dead, how does David view the circumstances? He will be

secretly glad. That would only be a human frailty. But there is no proof of it. "King David himself followed the bier" of Abner. He went to his funeral. "They buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept" (iii. 32). Tears are infectious. Why all this tearfulness on the part of David now—so valiant, so strong, so daring, at home and on the mountains, domesticated in the wilderness, counting a cave a palace? Why so broken down now? Because it is not in human nature to stand more than a certain amount of pressure. The old man weeps easily. Old soldiers often find their tears near at hand; they have had such discipline, such wearing experience, they have suffered so many losses, they have been pressed and pushed and driven with violence so extreme and unpitying, that there comes a time of reaction; they never shed tears in the fight; they were stronger than lions, they were swifter than eagles, in action, but there comes a time of recall, and then who can keep back the river of sorrow? There comes, too, a time when a man cannot bear to see all his contemporaries cut down one after another, even though in some respects they were hostile contemporaries. Their death makes him a stranger. He does not know the men who are coming on behind him. He has been accustomed to certain faces, salutations, messages, reciprocations, and now that men are falling on the right hand and on the left he feels a strange sense of solitude. What wonder if even the most valiant soldier-spirit should often break down in a child's tears?

How did David treat the dead Abner and estimate him?—

"And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" (iii. 38).

David was a just judge. He knew what foemen were worthy of his steel. This is not the man to write psalms charged with wickedness. We must, if we have so thought even for one moment, have misunderstood his point of view and the real intent of his quick-moving pen. Understanding the man, we shall understand his psalms; weeping with him who weeps, we shall begin to comprehend the movements of that singular mind, and read between the lines of that most resonant eloquence,

and feel the meaning of the music stealing into our opening hearts. Stand by men when they are in sorrow, if you would understand their speech or their song. David did not undervalue Abner. No doubt he often mourned over his perverted power. He would say to himself, How great a light Abner would be were he enlisted in a good cause! What a valiant soul he is, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding! What nobleness even in his desperate courage! He has been misunderstood by Joab. When he feasted with me in the palace he was little less than a king: he was a prince and a great man in Israel. We enrich ourselves by magnifying the excellences even of our opponents. We lose nothing by magnanimity. It is not the malign penetration which sees the faults which we need; it is magnanimity which sees them, and yet sees beyond them, that takes in the larger man—the other, better man: for that magnanimity let us mightily pray the God of heaven. David could have justified a minute hostile criticism on his part: he could have produced the evidence; he could have called the witnesses in scores who would have testified that David was right in forming a judgment of Saul or of Abner that was anything but kind; but David was a poet-saint, a prophet-worshipper, a man with that gift divine which sees the better man beyond the worst.

If these considerations applied to David only, we might dismiss them as not bearing upon our immediate life, but they bring with them a present and urgent application. David was the most illustrious type of Christ. In a sense, he was the father of the Saviour of the world. "Son of David," said the poor, the blind, the distressed, "have mercy on me." Jesus himself spake about David in relation to sonship and lordship, and propounded a great question concerning the relation between David and himself. When did Christ rejoice over his enemies? We cannot point to a single instance in which he was glad when evil befell his foes. When did he rejoice, saying, Behold their harvest fields are blighted, their fountains are dried up, all their ships are sunk, and their fortunes are scattered by an avenging wind? When did one malevolent word escape the lips of this Son of David? What was Christ's doctrine concerning the treatment

of enemies? He said: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." He was in very deed David's Lord. He advanced beyond the poet and stood forth as the inspirer. All the beautiful things we find in the Old Testament that are beautiful by reason of moral quality and value culminate in Jesus Christ. They are incomplete in themselves; they say, if we could hear them distinctly, Follow us; we are leading up to our own consummation that will be found in the Son of God. What view of his enemies did Christ take at the very last? Now that he hangs upon the tree he will speak what he feels. In his great agony his very soul will utter itself. In that hour he said: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Are we not right, therefore, in thinking of David in all these historical details as more than an actor in a vanishing scene—even as a type and forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ? What was dim yet beautiful in David, is bright and divine in Christ.

Now observe the point of weakness referred to at the outset:—

"And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness" (iii. 39).

The human is deeper than the official. "Though" king; there is a sad pathos in that "though." Though king, I cannot shake off the man; though crowned, I still have a heart; though great in office, I am overborne in sympathy; virtue has gone out of me at every point, and I cannot even lift my head to God's bright heaven; these men, the sons of Zeruiah—my own sister's sons—will not let me have peace; my three nephews have been interfering in all these things, forcing themselves upon me, forcing themselves upon mine enemies, and creating endless complications; they thought they were doing me service; their motive was good enough; that Asahel—"light of foot as a wild roe"—thought he was doing me service when he followed Abner;—O my sister's sons, would they but leave me alone! Who has not uttered this same cry? If his friends would leave him alone, he could manage his enemies. The motive was good, but the mind was not equal to the occasion; it was a little, petty, critical mind,

—not a grand and all-seeing comprehension. And as for Joab, what more hast thou, O king? This: "The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness." David could not go into the question of retaliation, some things we must refer to the eternal God. We would like to interpose, and say some word about them that would show our real feeling, but we are so pressed, struck, driven, impoverished, that we can only whisper our confidence in God. A marvellous picture is in the thirty-ninth verse of weakness and strength: weak on the human side; strong in spiritual conflict. David is so driven that the very breath has all ceased out of his body; his voice has dropped to the whisper of weakness; yet he says the Lord must determine everything. The Lord is in heaven, but his eyes are upon the earth. Joab has done this deed: providence will follow him night and day, and ensnare him and crush him. Let us leave our enemies where David left the enemy, and let us leave ourselves where David left himself—in the hands of the living God. Judge us and undertake for us, O God; give us the great heart, the large mind, the noble charity—the very spirit of the redeeming Christ: then, come battle or peace, come treachery or faithfulness,—come what may, we can do our little best, and leave the issue with the Judge of the whole earth.

SELECTED NOTE.

"*Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn*" (iii. 31).—Sacks are usually made of hair in the East, whence we may understand that where sackcloth is mentioned, haircloth is intended. Hence the idea is different from that which we, whose sacks are not of the same material, would affix to the term. That this is correct, seems to be confirmed by the fact that the use of haircloth as a penitential dress was retained by the early Oriental monks, hermits, and pilgrims, and was adopted by the Roman Church, which still retains it for the same purposes. Haircloth was, moreover, called "sackcloth" by the early Greek and Latin fathers, and this seems conclusive. Perhaps, in a general sense, the word means any kind of very coarse cloth, but undoubtedly more particularly cloth of hair than any other. There is a reference to this practice of assuming a mortifying dress as an expression of grief or repentance in Exod. xxxiii. 4. The principle is so obvious that there are few nations among which, in mournings for the dead, some kind of mortifying habit has not been adopted. We do not know that sackcloth is now much used for this purpose in the East; but ornaments are relinquished, the usual dress is neglected, or it is laid aside, and one coarse or old assumed in its place.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, our hearts live in the great hope that all flesh shall see thy glory. The clouds are very dark, and there are many who do not like to retain God in their thought. Broad is the road that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who walk its perilous way. Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Yet amid all these discouragements thou dost lift up thy voice like a trumpet and say that thy kingdom shall come and thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. How this is to be lieth not within the scope of our poor imagining. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it—this is our one and our indestructible trust. We rest in thy promise,—a nation shall be born in a day, the little one shall put the great down, and the strong one shall be smitten by the weak hand. We know that thou doeth all things excellently, with a suddenness that doth startle our ignorance and with a completeness which none can amend. The earth is thine and the fulness thereof; thou lovest the little wandering star, thou dost leave the uncounted host that have not fallen from their orbits and thou hast come after that which was lost, and thou wilt not return until thou hast found it.

Behold us in prayer; look upon us inspired by one expectancy, as uttering one cry: "Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Our heart is perverse and our way is crooked, and our arm is outstretched in cruel rebellion against thy throne, yet is thy cross, O Christ, higher than all the mountain of our guilt, and the shining of thy grace shall chase away the darkness of our sin. Our hope is in the cross, our confidence is in the Priest who died upon it: we look unto his blood, it is more than our sin, and it answers the charges of thy law, thou mighty, gracious Judge. Amen.

2 Samuel iv. 9-12.

"And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings: how much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron."

NOBLENESS AND SELFISHNESS.

WE remember the trouble which David had, again and again, with king Saul. For reasons which are obvious upon the narrative, Saul sought repeatedly to take the life of David, whom he once loved with a father's idolatrous fondness. He pursued him upon the mountains, he followed him into the caves, he did everything in his kingly power to inflict undeserved and fatal punishment upon David. Upon one occasion a young Amalekite came to David and told him that Saul was dead. David then questioned him as to the manner of his death, and the young Amalekite said that as he himself was upon the mount of Gilboa, he saw Saul hard-pressed, the chariots and the horses and the enemy were quickly following, and Saul begged the young man to stand upon him and kill him that he might not fall by the hand of the enemy. The young man accepted Saul's suggestion and killed him, and then ran to Ziklag to tell David that his enemy was dead; and, instead of being pleased with the tidings, David charged him with having put forth his hand and destroyed the Lord's anointed, and he called for his young men and told them to fall upon the Amalekite and smite him till he died, for that he had touched God's own king. We praise Cæsar for slaying the man who brought intelligence of Pompey's death; let us have some reverent regard for this passion in the heart of David—this loyalty and all but adoration for the man who was king of Israel.

Those who did not understand David, or took narrow and partial views of his character, imagined that they could always please him by relating some misfortune that had befallen the house of Saul. King Saul had a son who was of weak mind and of weak body, inanimate, dependent largely upon others for all that he was and did, especially dependent upon his uncle Abner. This man was accustomed to take a mid-day sleep. He went up into his room one mid-day to slumber, and there went in upon him two young men, Baanah and Rechab by name, and they made as though they would have fetched wheat from the royal residence, and when they found Ish-bosheth asleep they smote him under the fifth rib and beheaded him, and ran

through the plain all night until they reached Hebron, and when they found David they said, "The Lord hath avenged his servant; here is the head of the son of king Saul." This brought the circumstance already related to David's mind. He said, "When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings. How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? Shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?" And he slew them and hanged them up over the pool of Hebron—hanged the men who thought to have played a trick in his favour, and to have courted his patronage by slaying his enemies.

David seems to have taken the large and true view of these men who brought him tidings which they thought would have pleased him. He said, "They are essentially mean men; their meanness in this case counts for me, but I will none of them—hang them, drown them, burn them—they only want an opportunity to thrust the dagger under my fifth rib that they have drawn from the life of Ish-bosheth." We would teach this lesson especially to the young, and make it very clear to them, and write it upon their hearts and upon their minds, that they who would do a mean trick for us would not hesitate to do a mean trick against us.

It is not enough to be clever in life—we must also be right. There is nothing more contemptible than cleverness when it is dissociated from integrity. Always endeavour to avoid a merely clever person. Cleverness is a two-edged instrument, cleverness is a word you may apply to a thimble-rigger. Keep the word "cleverness" for very small occasions and for very small persons. Associate it with moral sensibility, associate it with the moral virtues, and it becomes proportionately dignified. To the so-called clever man we would give this word: You are said to be about the sharpest man in your neighbourhood; it is even said that you can take in any number of unwary people over your counter: you have such a glib and oily tongue that any persons coming to deal with you can be hoodwinked and deceived, and

can spend their money for that which is not bread, and their strength for that which profiteth not, and that when they go out of your place of business you laugh at them. You tell persons that what they are about to buy is of the very best quality, when you know that nothing worse was ever put into human hands. You sell off at an alarming sacrifice—of conscience; you deal in the cinders of great fires and the wreck of large bankruptcies. This may be clever, but it is not right. We urge you to make, as men of business, all you possibly can—get all the money you legitimately can make, but let every shilling be honestly won. You will find far more spending in it than in money that is feloniously pocketed. The first thing you have to make out in all life is, what is right. "That ye may be sincere." What does that word sincere mean? It is two Latin words in one, and it means without wax, a term employed in describing the quality of honey, without wax. Or it is a Greek word, which refers to porcelain, and the meaning of it is that if the china be held up between the eye and the sun, it is sincere, without speck or flaw or breach. What should we look like if Christ were to take us up and look at us as we look critically at porcelain? That is the only true view to take of ourselves. Judging ourselves by ourselves we become fools; by social standards we are all respectable and good and fair and decent and honourable, but the grand test is the law of divine rectitude, the standard and the balance of the sanctuary of heaven.

The real test of success is at the end. We never know what an action is, as to its real value, until we reach the end. Things may look tolerably well in the process—there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof is death. What talk Baanah and Rechab had that night as they hurried across the plain, what pictures they drew how David would receive them, how he would house them in the royal palace, how he would show them to the military and to the populace, and call for loud huzzas, how they would be the brothers whom the king would delight to honour, riding upon his noblest steeds, and for the time being sit at the front of his ranks and crowned with glory and honour. One said to the other, "Will not the king be pleased?" The reply was, "I cannot tell what he will give us

in return for this—we shall be great in Israel;" and having so said, they sped along at an accelerated pace, that they might be early in Hebron, and delight the king with the good gospel. Any man overhearing the two brothers in their colloquy, would have imagined that they were going straightforward to sit with the king upon his throne. They went to Hebron, and never left it. The men were to be promoted—were promoted to the gallows. The clever men died as the fool dieth, and the earth was not allowed to have their bones.

Let us be instructed by the narrative, for it may be even so with some of our own purposes and schemes. A thing is only everlasting in its consolations and honours in proportion as it is genuinely right. Is our trade, is our purpose, is our programme, is our policy, is our set in life right? If so, we have succeeded, even before we have begun. We have seen many a card house blown over; we have seen the rats enter many a knave's castle and eat it all up. If we are wrong, we are carrying the enemy in the ship, and the enemy will not awake until we are in mid-ocean, and then he will sink the vessel. Let us believe the voice of history; do not suppose that all this history is so much waste; it is the voice of human experience, and no wise man can afford to neglect the accumulated testimony of the experience of the race.

Behold the contrast between nobleness and selfishness, as seen in David and in those who brought him tidings concerning the fate of Saul, and the ill-luck of his child. There are moments when a man is almost God; and it was so with David in this case. He had his moments of fretfulness about Saul, and his moments of supreme fear, but in his heart he loved the grand old king of Israel; and where there is a supreme love it rises above everything, and sacrifices everything that would oppose its sovereign sway. Why, David never would touch Saul harmfully. There was one occasion when Saul was in his power, when David arose and cut the skirt off Saul's robe, and when Saul had gotten away some distance, David cried after him, "My father," and the mighty Saul looked back and said, "Is this thy voice, my son David?" And David said, "See, behold thou hast been in my power to-day and I spared thee. How long wilt thou believe the

foolish reports and the malicious rumours of mine enemies?" And Saul lifted up his voice and cried like a child. If David would not touch the king himself, if David held Saul in this high honour and veneration himself, what would he say to young men who came in with tidings of ill-fortune or with stories of blood? Put the two circumstances together, and see in the man who spared the king an explanation of the grandeur and nobleness of his temper when he was confronted by tales unworthy of the honour and the conscience common to human nature.

Have we any supreme love? Is our heart ever washed by a great tide of loving emotion about any man, woman, or little child? Then blessed are we; that river rises sometimes and submerges the whole life, and bears away all the ill-thinking and ill-behaviour of many days. Let us not allow our emotion to be talked down, nor allow the fountain of our tears to be sealed up so that it cannot be broken on any occasion. Sometimes it is good for the heart to sink under its own tears; it comes up out of that baptism sweeter and fresher than ever.

Beware of taking narrow views of life, then. The young Amalekite and Baanah and Rechab were men who saw only little points in a case. They were wanting in mental apprehensiveness and in moral expansion. There are many such men in the world, keen as a hawk in seeing little points, blind as a mole in beholding the measure of a circumference. Let us pray for that enlargement of mind which sees every aspect of a question. Such minds appear to be weak when they are only judicial. The narrow man always appears to be the strongest, the man who is capable of one idea only always appears to be the most emphatic teacher and leader of the nation or of the church; whereas the man of great apprehensiveness and expansiveness of mind sees so many points, has to collect and focalise so many considerations, that he is often thought to be weak, vacillating and hesitant, when he is really and truly a great judge and a patient critic.

To the man who has but one thought his work is easy. He rolls out that thought and keeps repeating it, and becomes credited, and not unduly in some cases, with earnestness, because of his tenacious attachment to that single idea. There are men

who cannot preach so; they have to be answering mentally, while they are speaking audibly, a thousand ghosts. O, the ghosts, the sprites, that chatter in the preacher's soul when he is many a time, apparently in his most earnest and vehement moods! The questions they ask, the difficulties they suggest!—and he has to choke them down, and speak the word which will be commonly understood by the average human mind. The Lord grant us more and more comprehensiveness and penetration of visual power that we may see all things necessary to the true guidance and direction of our life!

SELECTED NOTE.

"*They took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron*" (iv. 12).—Ish-bosheth (*man of shame*), a son of king Saul, and the only one who survived him. In 1 Chron. viii. 33, and ix. 39, this name is given as *Eshbaal.* Baal was the name of an idol, accounted abominable by the Hebrews, and which scrupulous persons avoided pronouncing, using the word *bosheth*, "shame," or "vanity," instead. This explains why the name Eshbaal is substituted for Ish-bosheth. Jerubbaal for Jerubbesheth (comp. Judg viii. 35 with 2 Sam. xi. 21), and Merib-baal for Mephi-bosheth (comp. 2 Sam. iv. 4 with 1 Chron. viii. 34 and ix. 40). Ish-bosheth was not present in the disastrous battle at Gilboa, in which his father and brothers perished; and, too feeble of himself to seize the sceptre which had fallen from the hands of Saul, he owed the crown entirely to his uncle Abner, who conducted him to Mahanaim, beyond the Jordan, where he was recognised as king by ten of the twelve tribes. He reigned seven, or, as some will have it, two years—if a power so uncertain as his can be called a reign. Even the semblance of authority which he possessed he owed to the will and influence of Abner, who kept the real substance in his own hands. A sharp quarrel between them led at last to the ruin of Ish-bosheth. Although accustomed to tremble before Abner, even his meek temper was roused to resentment by the discovery that Abner had invaded the harem of his late father Saul, which was in a peculiar manner sacred under his care as a son and a king. By this act Abner exposed the king to public contempt; if he did not indeed leave himself open to the suspicion of intending to advance a claim to the crown on his own behalf. Abner highly resented the rebuke of Ish-bosheth, and from that time contemplated uniting all the tribes under the sceptre of David. Ish-bosheth however reverted to his ordinary timidity of character. At the first demand of David, he restored to him his sister Michal, who had been given in marriage to the son of Jesse by Saul, and had afterwards been taken from him and bestowed upon another. It is, perhaps, right to attribute this act to his weakness; although, as David allows that he was a righteous man, it may have been owing to his sense of justice. On the death of Abner Ish-bosheth lost all heart and hope, and perished miserably, being murdered in his own palace, while he took his mid-day sleep, by two of his officers, Baanah and Rechab. They sped with his head to David, expecting a great reward for their deed; but the monarch—as both right feeling and good policy required—testified the utmost horror and concern. He slew the murderers, and placed the head of Ish-bosheth with due respect in the sepulchre of Abner, B.C. 1048 (2 Sam. ii. 8–11; iii. 6–39; iv.).

PRAYER.

Almighty God, our prayer is that we may be filled with the Spirit of Christ. He who has not the Spirit of Christ is none of his. We would dwell in love, as Christ dwelt in love; we would love our Father in heaven, and love one another as brethren. Hereby we know that we have passed from death unto life, because of this new love. Once we were strangers; now we are of the household of God in Christ Jesus the Son. Thus is our life enlarged; we are members of a family; we are enclosed within all domestic charities; we live upon the hospitality of God, and the strong is called upon to help the weak. This is thy church, thou Saviour of the world; this is the very commonwealth of heaven: may we enter into its spirit, and know one another lovingly and helpfully, that so we may make up to each other that which is lacking on the one side, and receive that which we so much require. Thus shall the world be at peace; human life shall be one sweet sacred harmony; there shall be good-will on earth towards men. We pray for this time—so restful, so bright, so like the Giver of the gift, the blessed Son of God. Now we have tasted of the bitterness of controversy, and clamour, and alienation, and differences amounting to hostility: why not now enter into thy peace, realising our brotherhood in Christ, hailing one another at the cross, seeing how much we all need the blood which cleanseth from all sin? May our agreements be greater than our differences; may our union in Christ sanctify all diversities of opinion. We pray for one another, that as life reveals itself to each the Lord's light may shine upon those who are in trouble about the mystery of being. Thou knowest what life is to us—now a great cloud filled with terror, and now a bright day all summer long, bright and full of music; now life is a gate which incloses us, and we cannot escape—a limit, a boundary, which mocks our frame: and now, suddenly, it becomes a great liberty, a wide sanctuary, open as the firmament of heaven. Whether we are in this state or in that, let thy sanctifying blessing fall upon us that we may be comforted on the one hand and chastened on the other, cheered lest we be swallowed up of overmuch sorrow, and subdued lest we become the victims of presumption. Deal out to us what bread we need; regard our hunger, and satisfy our thirst: but above all things take not thy Holy Spirit from us: may he dwell with us, live within us, take up his abode with us and train our life through all processes and stages to obedience, to wisdom, to pureness. Pity all our littlenesses, vanities, conceits; deal not harshly with us in view of our manifold mistakes, but when thou comest to deal with our sin—black, awful sin—then look at the cross of Christ, at the atonement of the blessed Son of thy bosom, and let his blood, in all things, speak better than that of Abel. At the cross, pardon us; at the cross, pity us; at the cross, give us heart again. Amen.

2 Samuel iv.

1. And when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled [by the loss of a great man].

2. And Saul's son had two men that were captains of bands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin: (for Beeroth also was reckoned to Benjamin:

3. And the Beerothites [Beeroth was one of the four cities of the Gibeonites] fled to Gittaim [neither the cause nor the place of the flight can be determined with certainty], and were sojourners there until this day.)

4. And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet [and therefore incapacitated for the rulership]. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

5. And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, who lay on a bed at noon [according to eastern custom].

6. And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat [like fetching wheat]; and they smote him under the fifth rib: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped.

7. For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bed-chamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain [of the Jordan] all night.

8. And they brought the head of Ish-bosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed [an impious and cruel interpretation].

9. ¶ And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity,

10. When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings:

11. How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?

12. And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.

2 Samuel v.

1. Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.

2. Also in past time, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.

3. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel.

4. ¶ David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.

5. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.

6. ¶ And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away [Thou shalt not come hither; but the blind and the lame shall keep thee off] the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking [*or* saying, David shall not] David cannot come in hither.

7. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.

8. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said [say], The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.

9. So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward.

10. And David [*Heb.* went, going and growing] went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him.

11. ¶ And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons [*Heb.* hewers of the stone of the wall]: and they built David an house.

12. And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.

13. And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David.

14. And these be the names of those that were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shammuah, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon,

15. Ibhar also, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia,

16. And Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphalet.

17. ¶ But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold.

18. The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim [Translated in Josh. xv. 8, the valley of the giants].

19. And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

20. And David came to Baal-perazim, and David smote them there, and said, The Lord hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim [the place of breaches].

21. And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them [took them away].

22. And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.

23. And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees.

24. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.

25. And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.

DAVID A TYPE OF CHRIST.

READING thus far in the second book of Samuel, we may be said actually to see the growth of David's character. Hardly anything is left to the imagination. The history is rather a spectacle than aught else, a reality that appeals to the eyes as if it would say: Behold, this growth is sudden, yet sure—visible; every one can see for himself how strong this man becomes day by day, how more beautiful in spirit, how diviner in consecration and purpose. We naturally, and not unreasonably, suspect growth that is so very rapid and almost visible. We found a proverb upon early ripeness. Yet history justifies us in affirming that the growth of David was not only a sudden and patent, but solid and abiding, increasing more and more in all beautifulness and fruition. We should have wondered about this, reading the history as it were contemporaneously, but now we can read it retrospectively. We know that David was one of the fathers of Christ, and that Christ did not disdain to be called the son of David. By the help of what we know now we can interpret many things in the life of David which would otherwise have been perplexing and bewildering. Yet there were great

black spots in the noble character, great broad bars of darkness across a life that was often so snowy in its beauty and purity. Even there a mystery not wanting in edification may be discovered. We cannot solve these mysteries now: but was it not well that David, being the father of Christ, should also retain almost visibly and faithfully his relation to ourselves—to the earth-state, to the world-school, that he should not be set away so high above us as to throw into utter discouragement all our aspirations and desires after the pure life? There we are upon perilous ground, yet we feel some need of being assured that David was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh—a man like ourselves—because we may be more encouraged by his weakness than we could have been by a strength which never failed, a vision which dared the sun. We may help one another not a little even by the weaknesses we struggle against.

We have seen how noble David was in the case of Saul; he is just as noble in the case of Ish-bosheth. The men thought they were doing a noble deed. They saw but one aspect of their action. They engaged in a venture; they thought themselves skilful, cunning, bold; within narrow limits they were so, but David looked upon the moral quality of the deed they had done, and hanged the perpetrators of the meanness. How difficult it is to see more than one aspect of a case and more than one feature of a character! How all but impossible to take in the whole situation and hold in vivid realisation all the elements that make up a character, a scene, a history! How the young men talked to themselves all night as they fled across the plain! How they almost added up the reward of their cunning bravery! How they put speeches into the king's mouth, saying, When he beholds this head he will be in raptures; he will not know how to endow us; he will smile upon us and hold us in high esteem. Sustained by this bad inspiration, the night was short, the darkness fled behind them, and ere they had well time to know where they were the morning shone upon them and they were in the presence of the king. History tells us what happened.

What is the permanent lesson? The men who will do a mean deed for you will do a mean deed to you when it suits their purpose. Let us put this doctrine into every variety of expression,

lest we lose its force and immediate application to our own position. Take it thus: the man who will tell a lie for you will one day tell a lie to you. The man is a liar. Without being such he could not have told the first lie in which he thought he was advancing your interests. When he told that lie he wrote himself in huge capitals LIAR. The man who tells lies in one direction must tell lies in all directions. Falsehood has no background that can be really trusted. The mean man will suit his own purpose, gratify his own ambition, and not consider your welfare when it comes to real crises. But this doctrine applied as David applied it would clear the world. Who would be left in business when every lying partner is turned out, when every false clerk is dismissed, when every hypocrite is displaced? Who would be left in the market-place? If we can answer that inquiry by a frank and honest reply to the effect that thousands of honest men would be left, then let us thank God for such a residue, and trace the miracle to his almightiness.

The men did not see that they were really dishonouring David. Who does see all round a deed? Their meaning was: We have done for you what you could not have done for yourself; and David resented that with haughty consciousness of his ability to do more for himself by the help of God than any other man could do for him. David could have killed Saul; David could have put down his enemies. We do not want the help of officious intermeddling. A man may be able to handle his enemies, but he may be distressed and disennobled by his friends. David could not bear to be thus laid under obligation to these men. Observe his contempt for meanness: "How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed?" (iv. 11). The action was cowardly, unsuited to the temper and quality of a king; there was in it no noble passion—nothing in it but the basest cunning and treachery. What is the permanent lesson? Would David have any occupation nowadays? Are there any to-day who take advantage of weakness? Then they belong to the brood of Rechab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite. Let their genealogy be clearly stated to them. Men love to hunt up a pedigree, to trace an ancestry: there can be no doubt in assigning them their coat-of-arms.

They have a bad parentage, and they themselves are worthy of it. Are there any men to-day who would strike a man when he is down, when he is afflicted, when he is unable to look after his own interests, when he cannot attend to the markets and see that justice is done to himself? Are there any that would go up to his chamber and tell him lies, or avail themselves of a false pretence and strike him under the fifth rib? Is the brood dead? Are the black souls extinct? If so, then David would have no occupation to-day. The question burns. We may well think over it, and wonder very much. The men who brought the news to David were hanged. So are all mean men sooner or later. There is only one fate for them. Rechab and Baanah were hanged by the pool in Hebron,—that is, in the most public place. All the inhabitants went to the pool for water, and in going to the pool for water they beheld the spectacle—two mean men hanged for the crime of meanness. Such is the bad man's fate. No one has a good word to say for him; no one owns the body: let strangers break the bones and hide the carcase in an unnamed grave; no one would claim the mean man. Let us be taught by history. It is wastefulness on our part to neglect the pressing lessons of daily life. "The candle of the wicked shall be put out;" "the triumphing of the wicked is short," and "the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment."

Now we pass into another climate. In the fifth chapter David is made fully king. He has been, so to say, partially king; now his kingship is to be completed:—"So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel" (v. 3). It is legitimate to inquire into the typology of the whole case. Being the father of Christ according to the flesh, it will be to our edification to ask where the lines coincide, where they become parallels, and where they again touch one another. The study will be at once interesting and profitable.

"David was thirty years old when he began to reign" (v. 4). How old was Christ when he entered into his public ministry? Was he not thirty years old? The full meaning of this it is impossible to find out; nevertheless the coincidence itself is a

lesson: we stop, and wonder, and think. Providence thus reveals itself little by little, and we are permitted to take up the separate parts, bring them together, and shape them into significance.

"And they anointed David king over Israel" (v. 3). Is that the word which is used when men are made kings. Is there not another word which is employed usually? Do we not say, And they crowned the king? The word here used is anointed,—a better word, a word with more spiritual meaning in it, and more duration. The oil penetrated; the oil signified consecration, purity, moral royalty. There was a crown, but that was spectacular, and might be lost. Was not Jesus Christ anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows? Have not we who follow him and share his kingship, an unction, or anointing, from the Holy One, through whom we know all things?

David reigned forty years. Forty is a perfect number. There are many numerals which represent perfectness, and forty—the four tens—is one of them. Or making the whole life seventy years we come again upon another aspect of perfectness: perfectness in the life and in the royalty: perfectness in both senses and in both aspects. And is not Jesus Christ to come to a perfect reign? Has he not his own forty and his own seventy—his own secret number, which represents to him mysteriously the perfectness of his reign? He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

The Jebusites mocked David when he would go and reign in Jerusalem; they said, "Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither" (v. 6). In other words: If you can overcome the lame and the blind, you may enter into Jerusalem, but other soldiery we will not interpose: even they will be strong enough to break the arms of David. Has no defiance been hurled at the Messiah? Has he not been excluded from the metropolis of the world? Are there not those who have mocked him and wagged their heads at him? Are there not those who have spat upon his name, and said, We will not have this man to reign over us? Let history testify, and let our own conscience speak.

David advanced more and more. The tenth verse has a beautiful

expression:—"And David went on, and grew great." The words are short, but the meaning is boundless. David was a persistent man—he "went on." It is the man who steadfastly goes on, who enters the city and clears a space for himself, in all departments and outlooks of life. And is not Jesus Christ going forth from conquering to conquer? Is he not moving from land to land, from position to position: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. . . . And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." Go on thou mighty Son of God!

Then we read in the eleventh verse, "And they built David a house." Even those who were averse to him came to this at the last. And is no house being built for Christ? Once he said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Is it to be always so? or is not the whole earth to be the house of the living Christ, the sanctuary of the crowned Lord? This is the voice of prophecy; this is the testimony of all history: in this inspiration we pray our bolder prayer and utter our grander hope. Jesus shall reign, and a house shall be built for him, and it shall be called the house of God.

"But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to the hold" (v. 17). Christ has enemies to-day. There are Philistines who are banded against him: they want to deplete his name of all spiritual meaning, to take away from him all the glory of his miracles, to deny even his incarnation, to treat him as a myth, a vision, or a dream; but still he goes down to the hold, and still he advances his position.

Having overthrown the Philistines in one conflict, we read in the twenty-second verse, "And the Philistines came up yet again." These words have modern meaning—namely, the words "yet again." The enemy is not easily foiled. One repulse is not

enough. The victory is not secured until the enemy is under foot—no truce, no compromise, no modification, no temporising, no living by mutual concession. David said, Shall I go up again as before? And the Lord said, No, let it be otherwise: "Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees,"—vary the method. Sometimes when you are not apparently working you may be working most and best of all: in fetching a compass you may appear to be running away from the enemy, but in reality you are laying a strong line far out beyond him which means his enclosure and destruction. The Church of the living God should be a skilful strategist: the Christian Church should be inventing methods; it should be adapting itself to the varieties of circumstances which mark the history of the current day; it should have a thousand plans. Herein is the weakness of the Church: we suppose that we must work only according to one method—once stereotype a plan, and revert to that under all circumstances. The Lord says, No: vary your method, change your operation: sometimes there must be direct conflict, and sometimes the fetching of a compass, sometimes great tumult and shock of arms, sometimes long patient waiting, but always having in view the same purpose, marked by majestic steadfastness—a complete, unchanging purpose to destroy the enemy. The Lord said a signal would be given: "And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself"—literally, then thou shalt be sharp, quick, eager; for a long time wondering if the sound has come, listening with the soul's ear, wanting to hear the sound. We should be in an attitude of attention when we cannot be in an attitude of fighting. Soldiers should always be on the strain—should always be earnest. So God signals to us from heaven. He signals to us through human events. He says, by this occurrence or by that, Now is the time to arise. If there is great discontent amongst the people, he says: You have an answer to that discontentment—speak it. If there is great mental doubt, difficulty, unrest, the Lord says to the Church: You could hush the tempest and bring in a great calm—not by argument, but by deeper consecration, by larger generosity, by tenderer love, by holier purity: work the miracle! May we have under-

standing of the times, and know when there is a sound in the tops of the mulberry trees, that we may not be working behind the event, or in front of it, but with it, having understanding hearts, and knowing what Israel ought to do.

SELECTED NOTES.

"*King David made a league with them in Hebron*" (v. 3).—Hebron is picturesquely situated in a narrow valley, surrounded by rocky hills. This, in all probability, is that "valley of Eshcol" whence the Jewish spies got the great bunch of grapes (Num. xiii. 23). Its sides are still clothed with luxuriant vineyards, and its grapes are considered the finest in Southern Palestine. Groves of gray olives, and some other fruit trees, give variety to the scene. The valley runs from north to south; and the main quarter of the town, surmounted by the lofty walls of the venerable *Haram*, lies partly on the eastern slope (Gen. xxxvii. 14; comp. xxiii. 19). The houses are all of stone, solidly built, flat-roofed, each having one or two small cupolas. The town has no walls, but the main streets opening on the principal roads have gates. In the bottom of the valley south of the town is a large tank, one hundred and thirty feet square, by fifty deep; the sides are solidly built with hewn stones. At the northern end of the principal quarter is another, measuring eighty-five feet long, by fifty-five broad. Both are of high antiquity; and one of them, probably the former, is that over which David hanged the murderers of Ish-bosheth (2 Sam. iv. 12). About a mile from the town, up the valley, is one of the largest oak-trees in Palestine. It stands quite alone in the midst of the vineyards. It is twenty-three feet in girth, and its branches cover a space ninety feet in diameter. This, say some, is the very tree beneath which Abraham pitched his tent; but, however this may be, it still bears the name of the patriarch.

"*Except thou take away the blind and the lame*" (v. 6).—Jebus possessed a secret supply of water, which enabled its inhabitants to stand out a siege of any length, probably in the form of subterranean access to perennial springs. It was absolutely necessary to cut this off, in order to take the strong castle. This seems to be alluded to in a peculiar term employed by the Scriptural narrative: "David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the *tsinnor* and smiteth the Jebusites and the lame and the blind, that one hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain" (2 Sam. v. 8). Now what may be the meaning of this term *tsinnor*, which besides occurs only in Psalm xlii. 7, where it is translated "water-spouts"? It has been explained by such various conjectures as "precipice," "the cliff or portcullis which Joab climbed," "the ravine by which the stronghold was girt," "canals," "outlet for water," "trough," "water-pipes," or, according to *The Speaker's Commentary*, "the water-course, the only access to the citadel being where the water had worn a channel—some understand a subterranean channel." Dr. Kennicott, however, seems to have given the best and most acute explanation, rendering the passage thus: David said, "Whosoever smiteth the Jebusites,

and through the subterranean passage reacheth the lame and blind." He adds: "Most interpreters agree in making the word signify something hollow, and in applying it to water, as we have in Josephus 'subterranean cavities.' Jebus was taken by stratagem. It seems to have been circumstanced like Rabatamana, in having also a subterranean passage." Strangely enough, in the excavations made during the year 1867, Captain Warren, near the top of this eastern ridge and about opposite the Fountain of the Virgin, discovered a rock-cut passage descending from the surface by a series of pits, stairways, galleries, leading from the surface down to the water-level, at a point about fifty feet inward from the Fountain. At another time he penetrated from the Fountain inward to the same point, the bottom of a shaft not far from forty feet in depth. This the Rev. Mr. Birch seizes upon as the long-lost *tsinnor* of Jebus. Somehow, he thinks, David learned how the Jebusites obtained their supply of water. Evidently there was no chance of taking the stronghold by assaulting its walls. Would any one try the desperate expedient of first pushing through the horizontal water-channel, at the imminent risk of being drowned, then of scaling the upright shaft, where a single stone dropped from above would bring certain death, and afterward of penetrating into the fortress through the narrow passage, which two or three men might readily hold against a hundred? The plan seemed desperate; but, as there was no alternative, David issued a proclamation to his followers that whosoever first got up through the *tsinnor*—the name at that time of this subterranean rock-cut passage—and smote the Jebusites should be commander-in-chief.

Mr. Birch suggests that Joab never could have performed the feat of penetrating to Jebus through the *tsinnor*, much less through the difficult passage discovered by Captain Warren, without aid from within the town. In other words some confederate among the Jebusites must have helped Joab in what otherwise would have been really an impossible undertaking. Who, then, was this confederate and, really, traitor to his people? With whom did Joab, whose craft was even greater than his prowess, negotiate for the secret betrayal of the stronghold of Zion, and on whom depend for aid in ascending the pits? What was the *bakhshish* promised and given to the ally of the followers of David the king? He answers only by casting suspicion over a spotless name hitherto. Years after, near the close of David's reign, we find a Jebusite of rank, by name Araunah, still in possession of the threshingfloor just outside the city of David: possibly he may have been the traitor, and retained this valuable possession as his reward. Josephus says: "Araunah was not slain by David in the siege of Jerusalem because of the goodwill he bore the Hebrews and a particular benignity and affection which he had to the king himself." Had we a Jebusite account of the fall of the fortress, perhaps it might contain some story which would scarcely justify the noble and spotless character from a Jebusite standpoint we give him. Certain it is, even from our own standpoint, Araunah, who ought to have fallen in the defence of his fortress-town with his fellows, or have perished with the rest after its capture, was the only man who lost nothing when Jebus fell—neither life, nor goods, nor lands, nor, in the estimation of David with his warriors, honour.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, we bless thee that the tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth. Thy house is in the midst of our houses. We would that our house might be as God's house, every house a home, and every home a church, and every church growing in grace and wisdom and spiritual power. This being our desire, thou wilt assist in its realisation, if so be we work industriously, with burning zeal, with simple faithfulness. The Lord grant that such may be our state of mind and heart, that so we may attain the divine purpose in our life, and shew forth to men what it is to live in God and have our being in the Most High. Thou has comforted us by thy grace, and healed us, yea abundantly hast thou come unto us in the mercies of every day; because thy compassions fail not, we are spared unto this hour—monuments of mercy, witnesses of grace, miracles of the love of God. We are what we are by thy grace, thou Living One, and not by our own skill; we are God's workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus, clothed with all beautifulness by the Spirit, and made heirs of the kingdom eternal by a mystery of love, which we can never penetrate, but which we feel and which we answer with rising gladness. We bless thee for the cross—the cross of Christ, the greatest mystery of thy love and wisdom and power: the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin; we need its ministry, we pray that we may realise its preciousness, and be found at last, not having on our own righteousness, which is a thing of the law and of form and mechanism, but having on the righteousness of Christ, wearing it as a garment, made anew in the image and likeness of thy Son. Let thy word continue to be precious to us—a lamp in the night-time, a song in trouble, a great and glad hope when all other things darken around us with threatening; then may thy word magnify itself in our experience, speaking to us as we are able to bear it and to endure its judgments and its encouragements. For a word so living, so full, so gracious we bless thee; may it be hidden in our hearts, and may it dwell within us richly—an answer to every temptation, a security in the time of danger. Amen.

2 Samuel vi.

1. Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

2. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.

3. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the

house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart.

4. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark.

5. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.

6. ¶ And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.

7. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.

8. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day.

9. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?

10. So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite.

11. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household.

12. ¶ And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.

13. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings.

14. And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod.

15. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

16. And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

17. ¶ And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.

18. And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts.

19. And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house.

20. ¶ Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!

21. And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me

before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord.

22. And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.

23. Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.

CARE OF THE ARK.

IN the second verse we read "David arose." A new passion seized him; a sudden enthusiasm stirred him like a great wind from heaven. We cannot account for these inspirations, excitements, new consecrations and purposes in life: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit"—to new life, new force, new duty. Sometimes we say, Why did not men rise before? The answer is, They could not: the rising of men is not in themselves. Herein perhaps we have been harsh and unjust to one another, thinking that it lay within our own power to be enthusiastic when we pleased, to burn with holy zeal just according to the changeableness of our own will,—as if to-day we could be almost seraphs, and to-morrow could be earthly and cold, wholly without the Spirit, and bent on finding eternity in time. But life is not so fickle a thing as that. There is a centre, there is a Throne, there is a living King, and in connection with these great central sovereignties and dominions there is a mysterious ever-operating Spirit that will not fall under our calculations and laws and predictions as to his operations in the human mind and on the human heart. Revolutions come into nations, and nobody can tell how; those who would explain them will point a fact here and there, which may or may not have much relation to the vital circumstance. And so a man who never prayed before will suddenly cry mightily to God for help, or shout in fear and agony as if he had seen some new and terrible vision which had affrighted his soul. The times and the seasons in every sense are with God. One thing we can do, blessed be his name,—we can wait, we can pray, we can be ready, we can tarry for the King. Blessed is that servant who shall be found waiting when his Lord cometh; he will have

nothing to do but to spring at once to his work, and turn the little day into a large opportunity.

David arose to bring the ark to the metropolis. A much minuter account will be found in chapters xii.–xvi. of the first book of Chronicles. In connection with this transport of the ark to Jerusalem we should read the sixty-eighth and the one hundred and first Psalms, and thus realise the historical colour of these great songs. The twenty-fourth Psalm must not be omitted in connection with this account; to that we shall subsequently refer. David would have the metropolis the centre of national worship. Being now enthroned there, he would have the ark near the throne. This idea is not without sublimity, and not without practical bearing upon our own nationality and own own religious civilisation. Be strong in the high places; see that the throne is within the operation of the mysterious influence of the altar; let there be no great distance between royalty of an earthly kind and service of a spiritual sort. Let every metropolis be the best city in the whole land. It ought to be. For some reason, historical or immediate, it is a city of renown,—why should not its fame be ennobled by the richest spiritual associations and the richest spiritual activities? An irony not to be tolerated, that every other part of the land should be better than the metropolis! Is that the right sequence of things? Is that honest logic? Ought it not to be otherwise? To think that a man should be better everywhere else than in his understanding and in his moral nature—should be wealthy, influential, socially great, physically well-cared for, and yet that his intellect should be neglected and his heart should be left desolate! Nay, this is an iniquitous irony. It should stand to reason that a man should have a large well-furnished understanding, a quick and responsive heart, an obedient will in relation to all heavenly commands, and the rest shall be added unto him. We must discover the immediate bearing of this upon our particular circumstances. The doctrine need not be limited to nations; it may be brought within the area of families. Is it to be thought of that every one in the house is good except the master, the head? Is he alone wanting in the upper nature, the heavenly outlook, the vital communication with God? Applying the doctrine in

this direction, we feel at once how intensely practical it becomes, and how beautiful would be the living sequence if we could see the father, the mother, the firstborn, and the others as it were in the order of time and nature moving upward and onward to larger life and to larger service. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

How is the ark to be moved? For forty years the ark has been in one man's house. Perhaps the law may have been forgotten in that time. We read, in the third verse, that "they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah." There is a touch of veneration about this arrangement. The cart was "new." In the olden time and in eastern cities great store was set by new things: the colt upon which Jesus rode was to be one whereon never man sat; the tomb in which he was laid was a tomb in which never man was laid before. There used to be a kind of pagan veneration for new things. Samson said, If you bind me with new withs—they must be new—then I shall be weak as other men. That experiment having failed he added, If you bind me with new ropes—they must be new—"never occupied" is the old English word—never occupied before, then my strength will be as the strength of other men. So we find here that the cart on which the ark was to be carried is a new cart. Where was the law? A dead letter. We can outlive our laws. We can forget the Bible. We can so accustom ourselves to policies and moralities of our own invention and construction as to forget the law of Sinai, the commandments of the living God. When Moses distributed the waggons and the oxen in ancient time the commandment ran in this direction, "But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders." Oxen and waggons they were to have none. When the ark was to be carried it was to be carried by living men, and they were to be proud of the crowning honour of having part or lot in bearing the ark of the Lord. Let us not look at such details as little things, and suppose that it matters nothing whether the ark is carried in one way or another, provided that it is brought to its proper destination. There is nothing trifling in the kingdom

of heaven; there is nothing trifling in human life, when we really understand it. If God has thought it worth his while, in the mysterious exercise of his love, to number the hairs of our heads, he has rebuked the frivolity which separates things into important and non-important, into religious and secular,—as if a man might pray regarding some things and omit to pray regarding others. The whole earth is a sanctuary. All life is a priesthood or a sacrifice. We lose valuable elements out of our character when we treat things trivially and do our work with a loose hand. All our life is written down for us; blessed be God for that assurance; the next thing to be done is to find out where, and to read the record with eyes made watchful by love, made penetrating by loyalty to God. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord;" there is not only a general supervision of his way of movement, and a fixture of the end in which that movement will culminate, but all the steps—each of them is ordered by the Lord—now uphill, now down in the valley,—now in the place of graves, now in the wilderness of desolation;—enough if the steps are where God meant them to be and if our hands are locked in his.

"And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it" (v. 6). Did the oxen turn aside naturally because of the threshingfloor? Had not they, too, come home? Did they not betray natural impatience when they approached the place where food was kept? The ark shaking under the movement of the oxen, Uzzah, who was undoubtedly a Levite, put forth his hand and took hold of the ark in well-meant purpose. But he was killed (v. 7). The ark is never in danger. Could we work this conviction into our minds, it would save us from a thousand inventions and schemes by which to support the throne of the living God. That throne needs no buttress of our building. What share have we in keeping the stars in their places? How much of the security of the constellations is owing to our pre-arrangement, forethought, and devotion? God will take care of his own ark, and his own kingdom and truth in the world. If men did less, more would be accomplished, so far as the protection of these inner spiritual mysteries is concerned.

We have work enough to do, but we must not trespass, violate the limits within which we have been enclosed, and take upon us supposed duties which we can never discharge. We cannot guard the truth. That is in God's keeping. If we touch it we may do injury to ourselves, if our touch be done in any spirit of undue anxiety. God was most particular regarding the ark. It must not be moved until the priests had covered it; and whilst they were in the act of doing so the Levites were not so much as permitted to look upon the mysterious box. Then the ark was to be carried upon staves appointed for that purpose. This was God's method,—why should not God have his own way with his own work? This incident rebukes anxiety, limits human service, testifies to the divine presence. Why this anxiety about the kingdom of heaven? Let the anxiety be fixed upon ourselves—upon our spirit, conduct, action; let us be severe in cross-examination of our own motive and intention: then our service will be large and beneficent.

David got a new view of divine providence upon the day on which a breach was made upon Uzzah. He "was afraid of the Lord that day" (v. 9). David began in gladness. He began to praise "the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals;" and the enthusiasm was enthusiasm of music, a passion of delight; and suddenly David was paralysed, filled with fear. He did not know that God was so careful, so critically particular. Such fear has a great place in spiritual education. The culture of the soul is not to be perfected by instruments made of fir wood only, even on harps, psalteries, timbrels, cornets, and cymbals; that is but one aspect and department of our spiritual education—needful, right, useful; but a holy fear, a sense of solemnity, a terror that owns the divine nearness may have much to do in chastening, ennobling, and sanctifying our character. Frivolous men never come to any good. For a time, they seem to carry the day with them, but because there is no deepness of earth they soon wither away. The truly religious life is a life of awe, solemnity, holy self-restraint, and almost apprehension that at any moment God may break forth in flame and consume the imperfect worshipper. These terms of course have their adaptation

to particular experiences, and must not be forced upon men as if they were of general and uniform application. Each man knows what is his own particular case; let him turn his anxiety into a daily prayer.

Being afraid of the Lord that day, David could not complete his purpose:—

"So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household" (vv. 10, 11).

But the ark of the Lord had been in the house of Abinadab forty years, and we do not read of any particular benediction falling upon that house. That is quite possible. Men may have God in the house, and not know it. Men may have the Bible in the house, and never read it; or men may read the letter, and never enter into the spirit of the book. There is a difference between mere lodgment, and generous and appreciative hospitality. What a difference there is between a ceremony and a welcome—mere politeness almost amounting to mechanical veneration, and cordial sympathy, loving appreciation, a heart going out in great bursts of affection towards God for his compassion and love and manifold mercy! Abinadab and Obed-edom were in very deed not the same men. We do not all derive the same advantage from the Bible. One man reads it, and it is a letter—very stiff, formal, pedantic, reading like a royal proclamation, or like an ancient document out of which the meaning and immediate force have somehow become evacuated. Another man reads the Bible as if it had just been written—an immediate message from heaven, a comforting utterance from God's condescending heart, a speech made audibly, with all the fascination and persuasiveness of celestial music. We do not all get the same advantage from the Church. Attendance upon divine worship may be a ceremony; or we may long for the opening of the gates of the house of the Lord; we may "prevent" the sun—be there before the light is there, waiting, longing, yearning to be admitted, and find in the place, itself speaking to us, comforting though invisible angels of God. Obed-edom is a word which signifies obedience. The word obedience is almost literally found in the word Obed-edom. We find in that translation of the

name the explanation of the blessing. If we were more obedient, we should be more richly blessed: to him that doeth the will shall the doctrine be more and more revealed. He who does most for God gets most from God and best comprehends God's thought and purpose.

David having heard that the time of fear had passed and the time of blessing returned, came to complete his original intention:—

"And it was told king David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness" (v. 12).

Some men can work better in the sunshine than in the storm. They are glad in the summer day, but they fear and quake in the day of storm and tempest or of wintry desolation. God is pleased to accept our service according to our temperament and capacity. Every man must work in his own way, and God will judge us all.

Now we read in the thirteenth verse a singular expression:— "And it was so, that when they that bare the ark. . . ." Experience had not been lost upon these people; there were no oxen and waggons employed on this second occasion. Nothing is said to account for the change; but the change is sufficiently accounted for by previous events. Beautifully do these words read— "Bare the ark of the Lord," living men serving the living God; men serving him immediately and directly, and not by proxy or through the intervention of inferior animals, but the living men engaged in the living service of the Living King. It is beautiful as a piece of finished music.

"David danced before the Lord with all his might" (v. 14). Here was religious enthusiasm. Without enthusiasm, what is religion? Until we feel the passion of love we do not enter really into the spirit of Christ. We cannot hold down our emotions, and keep back our heart like a prisoner, in some high seasons of spiritual delight. Why should not congregations exclaim when they are moved by the spirit with great emotions of gratitude and delight? Is there anything undignified in the grand Amen of a thousand hearts uttered in one solemn exclamation? We must not kill enthusiasm, nor discourage enthusiasm,

but cultivate it, direct it, and turn it into a great motive power by which we shall do more work, and do it with increasing and ever-multiplying gladness.

But one saw David's enthusiasm :—

"Michal, Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart" (v. 16).

There are unsympathetic observers. We must take our life from one of two sources as to its key and purpose: either from those who are cold, selfish, worldly, and incapable of enthusiasm; or from those who are spiritual, loving, ardent of nature, and who keep back nothing which it lies within their power to bestow, that God may be honoured. Now by which of these powers shall we be governed—by the enthusiastic David, or by the contemptuous Michal? Why this despising of glad king David? The explanation is given in the same verse: "Michal, Saul's daughter." In very deed a daughter of Saul! Some people are damned by their parentage! How far they are to be blamed, who can say? Michal brought this curse with her into the world. To be part of the progeny known for coldness, selfishness, vanity; to be the children of men who never prayed; to be burdened with the name of men who never knew the cross; —surely God will be pitiful to such! He will remember them in their generation as well as in their individuality. The omniscient is judge: let us therefore be glad. God knows through what processes we have passed—how we have been limited, and overweighted, and held back, and perverted; how evil influences have risen up within us of which we could give no rational account: but he who keeps record of the generations, and follows a man down through the ages, knows what black lines gather themselves up in him; and God will be pitiful to the burden-bearer, sweetly merciful to those who, longing to cast off the burden, seem to be unable to do more than reveal their weakness.

The ark having been brought in, the twenty-fourth Psalm was sung. It is something to have the very ode before us which was sung at the time of the entrance of the ark into the metropolis. How nobly that Psalm ends!—"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the

King of glory shall come in." Then the inquiry: "Who is this King of glory?" Then the great thunder answer: "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Then: "Who is this king of glory?" And the great triumphant shout: "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory." There is no ark now to bring in, but there is a topstone to be brought on. Jesus Christ is building his tabernacle, or his temple, his church, watching the building rise stone by stone, and the topstone shall be brought on with shoutings of "grace, grace unto it." In that glad hour, the coldest man will become hot; and he who has never known the passion of enthusiasm will be caught in the very agony of religious thankfulness.

SELECTED NOTE.

"*Michal . . . saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord*" (v. 16).—The Hebrews, in common with other nations, had their sacred dances, which were performed on their solemn anniversaries, and other occasions of commemorating some special token of the divine goodness and favour, as means of drawing forth, in the liveliest manner, their expressions of joy and thanksgiving. The performers were usually a band of females, who, in cases of public rejoicing, volunteered their services (Exod. xv. 20; 1 Sam. xviii. 6), and who, in the case of religious observances, composed the regular chorus of the temple (Ps. cxlix. 3; cl. 4), although there are not wanting instances of men also joining in the dance on these seasons of religious festivity. Thus David deemed it no way derogatory to his royal dignity to *dance* on the auspicious occasion of the ark being brought into Jerusalem. The word used to describe his attitude is מְכַרְכֵּר, in the reduplicate form, intimating violent efforts of leaping; and from the apparent impropriety and indecency of a man advanced in life, above all a king, exhibiting such freaks, with no other covering than a linen ephod, many learned men have declared themselves at a loss to account for so strange a spectacle. It was, unquestionably, done as an act of religious homage; and when it is remembered that the ancient Asiatics were accustomed, in many of their religious festivals, to throw off their garments even to perfect nudity, as a symbol sometimes of penitence, sometimes of joy, and that this, together with many other observances that bear the stamp of a remote antiquity, was adopted by Mahomet, who has enjoined the pilgrims of Mecca to encompass the Kaaba, clothed only with the *ihram*, we may perhaps consider the linen *ephod*, which David put on when he threw off his garments and danced before the ark, to be symbolic of the same object as the *ihram* of the Mahommedans. The conduct of David was imitated by the later Jews, and the dance incorporated among their favourite usages as an appropriate close of the joyous occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles.

The Jewish dance was performed by the sexes separately. There is no evidence from sacred history that the diversion was promiscuously enjoyed, except it might be at the erection of the deified calf, when, in imitation of the Egyptian festival of Apis, all classes of the Hebrews intermingled in the frantic revelry. In the sacred dances, although both sexes seem to have frequently borne a part in the procession or chorus, they remained in distinct and separate companies (Psalm lxviii. 25; Jer. xxxi. 13).

PRAYER.

Almighty God, it is not in man that liveth to direct his way. There is no way in the darkness. Thou hast made the darkness a prison: we know not its size, we cannot tell how long it will endure; it is a burden, and we sink under it; it is a mystery, and we have to answer to it. We would acknowledge God, that in all our paths we may be directed. We would not go out alone; we would never move but under God's inspiration. We do not want to consult ourselves now, for we have seen our own folly in countless cases; we want no counsellor but God. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Make the light, show the work, give me the strength, and work in me a spirit of loving obedience,—that is all we want; it seems so little, yet it is so much—yea, it is all grace, the very perfectness of Christian culture. Help us, then, to say, if not always clearly and firmly, yet with great meaning, Not my will, but thine be done. That is the last sentence thou dost teach in thy school. We cannot say it as we would like to say it; our heart keeps something back; we will not yet deny ourselves: we will have a self-loving existence; we insist upon it that consciousness alone makes heaven: we will not leave all things absolutely in God's hands. Yet we pray that we may be able to do this some day—day of miracle, day of heaven! Then death shall have no pain for us, the cross will have no agony we cannot bear, and heaven will be round about us. We pray thee to direct us in every step. As thou hast numbered the hairs of our head, and as thou hast known our thought afar off, so let our uprising be a religious act, and our downsitting an expression of religious trust. Take away from us all things temporal, material, so far as their debasing influence is concerned, and lift us and them up to high heavenly levels, that we may be lost in God. Surely we have learned all this in the school of Jesus Christ thy Son. He is our Teacher, as well as our Propitiator; we hold our doctrine from him: we know nothing of Christianity that we have not learned from Christ, and if we have put anything of our own into it, behold we have spoiled the revelation of thy love. Jesus is our refuge, our trust, our plea; a strong tower, a sanctuary that cannot be violated; an answer to law, a security in judgment. May his Spirit live in us, mould us, sanctify us, inspire us, and may we be so like Christ as to be almost mistaken for him. Amen.

2 Samuel vii.

1. And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies;

2. That the king said unto Nathan the prophet [the first mention of him],

See now, I dwell in an house of cedar; but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains [compare Hag. i. 10].

3. And Nathan said [speaking from the impulse of his own heart] to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee.

4. ¶ And it came to pass that night [the night following Nathan's conversation with David], that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying,

5. Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?

6. Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.

7. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes [judges?] of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

8. Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote [pastures], from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:

9. And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.

10. Moreover I will [I have] appoint a place for my people Israel, and will [have] plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

11. And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the Lord telleth thee that he will make thee an house.

12. ¶ And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom [Solomon may have been already born].

13. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

14. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever [David was the head of the line which culminated in Christ Jesus].

17. According to all these words, and according to all this vision [a word applicable to every divine communication], so did Nathan speak unto David.

18. ¶ Then went king David in [to the tent he had pitched for the ark], and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?

19. And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?

20. And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord God, knowest thy servant.

21. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them.

22. Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any god beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears [the same word applies to written records, and to divine communications made in any way].

23. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel whom God went [in the Hebrew both the divine name and the verb are plural] to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you [for *them* in the Vulgate] great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?

24. For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God.

25. And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.

26. And let thy name be magnified [hallowed be thy name!] for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee.

27. For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.

28. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant:

29. Therefore now let it please thee [it will please thee] to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.

Chapter viii.

(The eighth chapter closes the direct narrative of David's reign. The rest of this book gives detailed accounts of particular incidents occurring at irregular intervals.)

1. And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them [reduced them to a position of inferiority]: and David took Metheg-ammah [no such place known. Means, took the bridle of the metropolis] out of the hand of the Philistines.

2. And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites [who were supposed to have killed David's father and mother] became David's servants, and brought gifts [paid tribute].

3. ¶ David smote also Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his border [to cause his hand to return] at the river Euphrates.

4. And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven hundred [seven thousand] horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: and David houghed [hamstrung] all the chariot horses, but reserved of them for an hundred chariots.

5. And when the Syrians of Damascus [the most powerful branch of the Syrian race] came to succour Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men.

6. Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.

7. And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem.

8. And from Betah, and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, king David took exceeding much brass.

9. ¶ When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer,

10. Then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer, and smitten him: for

Hadadezer had wars with Toi. And Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass :

11. Which also king David did dedicate unto the Lord, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued :

12. Of Syria [of Edom ?], and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines, and of Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

13. And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men.

14. ¶ And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.

15. And David reigned over all Israel ; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.

16. And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host ; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder [chancellor] ;

17. And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests ; and Seraiah was the scribe ;

18. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites [bodies of men named here for the first time], and David's sons were chief rulers.

THE INTENDED TEMPLE.

THERE is something beautiful in allowing certain men to muse a long while in religious silence, and waiting for their first word after the long contemplation. What can a king be thinking about when he is silent, almost day after day ? What will an old warrior say after a fit of silence ? He will cry because there are no more enemies to be conquered, or he will propose to add some new province to his crown. But David was more than soldier, and more than king. Soldier and king are passing terms indicative of accidental callings and situations ; there is no eternal substance in them, as we understand the words. David was a seer, a prophet, a man with the inner vision, gifted with the genius of insight and foresight, the poetic soul ; the man who turned common things into things uncommon. A worthy predecessor might such be of the Coming One, who turned supper bread into his flesh, and supper wine into his blood ! David looking at his own personal comfort did not say, Let me now

enjoy it; I have paid dearly for it: everything in my house cost me blood; if any man is entitled to a long quiet afternoon in life, I am the man; I am thankful for this tranquillity, and nothing shall disturb it. Men of David's quality never make speeches of that kind: their peace is in their activity; their Sabbath is in their worship: the Sabbath is not an external time, a figure on a dial-plate, it is rapture of soul, elevated meditation,—deep, loving, full reading of the divine statute and study of the divine ordinances, and a practical invention of ways by which to express the true peace and love of the soul. So, said David, look at the condition of affairs: I dwell in a house of cedar, and the ark of God dwelleth within curtains—in an apparently insecure place, in a habitation unworthy of its history and dignity; I am sensible that things are out of balance, out of harmony, out of proportion; it cannot be right that I should have all this gold and all this splendour, and that God's ark should be resident within curtains.

Truly, he was a poet, with a fine sense of rhythm. Were a syllable too much in a line it would afflict him like the puncture of an edged instrument. Without studying letters, he knew when things swung in astronomic rhythm and balance and harmony. We may have lost that fine sense of unity and practical poesy; some men have lost it in speech. God has set all things in relation. He is a God of order. He has published the universe as a poem, and all his goings fall into noble sequence. We must study that spirit and pray for it, so that we cannot rest while a picture is out of square, whilst a pillar that ought to be upright is leaning a little to the right or to the left. We ought to be flung into disorder and sense of shame by a false colour, a false note. But whilst this is impossible to us in a practical way, what is possible to us is a sense of moral justice, a sense of righteous relation, a sense of what is due to God. To be at ease whilst his house is without a roof is to proclaim oneself no child of Heaven. It was nothing to David that his own house was lighted with splendour, whilst the ark was without a fit lodgment. Here is the poet again—the poetic soul, the poetic conscience; the nature that studies harmony, relation, completeness, music. It is wonderful how content some people can be in the wildest

tumult, and marvellous to observe how such people would make themselves the judges of what other people ought to be and to do: they themselves can be at rest—why not all the world? They do not see the dust, the mud, the soil, the stain, the flaw, the inequality,—why should other people look after such things? But these people must not be allowed to rule a universe which God has made.

Having come into personal comfort, David will do good. That is the right expression of gratitude. What can I do for the Church? What can I do for the poor? Having read many books, and acquired some information, what can I do for the ignorant? Having a table off which crumbs fall, what is to be done with the crumbs at least? If we begin by giving away the crumbs, we may end by cutting off part of the body of the loaf. Begin where you can. This nobility of benevolence is a growth. It pleases us to think we are economic, and have a keen eye for lines and limits and stopping-places, but as we give bread, or knowledge, or help of any kind, the next donation becomes easier than the one before; and so here, as everywhere, and now, as always, we are lured, not driven, to noble issues. Here is a man with a grand design. It is something to have a great purpose, although it may never come to anything visible. David dreamed a temple, and he was the better for the dream. In proportion to the width and general nobleness of our thought is the benefit accruing from it to our whole life. A grand wish is an instrument of education. It comes almost to the dignity of a prayer. Herein is the wonderful mystery of prayer in human conduct: we cannot follow the prayer, or lift up the suppliant to the noble petition, but having uttered the supplication we are proportionately ennobled by the very sacrifice. Think of a mind without a great thought, a heart without a generous purpose, a life without a dream! Why, it is like the earth without sky. Cultivate high wishes, fine desires, pure aspirations, religious outgoings of soul, and though they may never come to anything visible and tangible, so far as this world is concerned, the heart is the better for this ministry of purpose, this ministry of secret purification, and this ministry of dispossession of evil by the encouragement and culture of good.

Nathan and David settled the matter according to their own will. Nathan was a man who might perhaps be not indisposed to agree with the king whatever he said. He may come to another temper under divine ministry; for that we must wait. The idea struck Nathan as a good one. Nathan had no objection. He said, The idea is beautiful: carry it out instantaneously; the Lord is evidently with thee; this is a thought the image and superscription of which cannot be mistaken; and Nathan went home to sleep. There are some things that appear to need no judgment. There are some proposals that are so beautiful and precious that we at once accept them, endorse them, and pass them on to fulfilment, and then retire to rest. The Lord taught David another lesson; he said: This thing is all wrong; it is out of season; there is much more to be done before this man can advance in the direction he has proposed: my house must not be built by his hands; I have an interest in my house: I care for the masonry as well as for the sanctuary. No blasphemer ought to be engaged in building the walls of a cathedral; no flippant man ought to touch the meanest part of God's house; and no man of blood should build a temple. It is not every man who can give to a Christian subscription. The Church should not beg of bad men, because their money is bad. It is a fearful thing to serve in the sanctuary. Who can serve now but those in whom God may inspire the wish at least to be better, to be worthy to light a lamp or put one stone on the top of another in his great house? "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Yet how gentle is the Most High! Who can speak like God? It is the dignity that gives the value to the condescension. The lesson which God taught to David is to trust the providence which has been good from the very first:—"Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote,"—so I am not going to forsake thee; if I had taken thee from a throne, reasoning in another direction might have been at least partially justified, but "I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel."

> "His love in time past forbids me to think,
> He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink."

God will have his providence judged as a whole,—that is to say, he will have the mind thrown back to the point of origin, and have all the days linked, like loops of gold, like loops of light; then he will say to the subject of his gracious government: Look back to the beginning; count the days; read between the lines; study the whole, and see how all the time I have been building thee a house; and, until that house is finished, wait! What peace it would give to us all if we could adopt this holy method of criticism! Look at the beginning: Where were we? What were we? How have we been trained, watched, defended! "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." The men that waited for my halting—saith the psalmist—were disappointed, for, by God's grace, I never halt. Sometimes we have said, If another great gust of wind like the last should arise, the roof will be blown off our life-house. But it never did arise. Sometimes we have had the last coal in our hand to put into the grate, and we have measured it with an anxious eye, and calculated how long it would last, and then said the cold would overcome us; but it was a wonderful coal: it burned without being consumed, and made wonderful necromancy for us in the grate—built cities for us, planted forests visible, had all kinds of operation proceeding within the fiery sphere; and then, behold, the bitter cold never benumbed us. Why, then, should we be so fearful to-day, and speak now as if to-morrow would be our last—as if we could endure no longer? It is not we who endure; it is God. God is in us, with us, for us; Immanuel—God with us. So whilst David is disappointed on the one side, he is comforted on the other.

God further shows that all things are critically timed: "Thou shalt sleep with thy fathers" (v. 12)—But God never sleeps. He says: "I will put thee to rest, O brave soldier, chivalrous grand heart; I will close thine eyelids, stained with rivers of tears; I bury the universe." But is the universe ended when David sleeps? The universe always begins—never ends. "Thou shalt sleep"—but in verse 13, "he shall build." We must leave something for the future to do. All things are written down in God's book. Do not be afraid of this doctrine because some people call it Fatalism.

Some people have a mischievous faculty of inventing foolish names, and then fall into the snare of being victimised by their own expressions. Fatalism is a stone which the enemy has thrown at God's providence, but God's providence abides the same as if the stone had never been lifted. The end is known from the beginning: there hath no temptation happened unto us that was not foreseen. The devil cannot invent a new temptation. He shot all his arrows in the first encounter, and he has no more to shoot. We understand him, and we can beware of his coming.

Then is Solomon to be a perfect man, to have all his own way, to do what he pleases, to shed what blood he likes, and build the temple any size he may? God forbid! Hear the word of the Lord:—"If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him" (vv. 14, 15). There is a great central line of providence and purpose. God is not turned aside by what happens to-day or to-morrow, in the nature of accidental occurrence. This is the great doctrine of strength and assurance. The Lord reigneth. He moves by a certain definite unchangeable line, with many a variation of outward circumstance and visible ministry: the fear is that we may be deluded by the accidental and the familiar, and mistake the central, eternal purpose of God. God's purpose is to save the world, and save it he will. God's purpose is to have the whole world for his house, and he will not rest until the topstone be brought on with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it." So David is told that he must not build, but he must still work; so in the eighth chapter—without being unduly critical regarding chronology—in the eighth chapter we find him at work again. And that is God's answer to us in many a reverie. We must not be left too long in the easy homestead; we must be put out in the cold air, and climb the steep hill. Where we cannot build a temple, we may at least destroy a mischief.

In the eighth chapter David accomplishes seven victories. He could not have rested with six; his sense of harmony would have been disturbed again: the victory must be complete: seven

is the mystic number; it represents fulness, completeness, fruition, satisfaction. The eighth chapter could not have been written in the New Testament. David's Son never could have re-enacted this chapter. The day of David was a day of war, battle, blood, conflict; the day of Christ is a day of war, but a day of spiritual contest: the instruments are not carnal: the words are gentle, the weapons are arguments, the great thunder-burst is the eloquence of truth, the eloquence of music. But we must not force the ages. This record is in its right place. Every age has its own genius; its own orthodoxy; its own opportunities; and every age has its own interpretation of nature and of grace. Think of the time when there was a false theory of astronomy: what matter? Now it would be doing violence to civilisation; then it marked a point in slow progress. Think of the time of witchcraft: what of it? It meant something more than it seemed to be: it was a longing, a yearning, a struggle after something almost within reach. Think of the time of idolatry, when the heathen were falling down before all manner of vain idols: what of it? Now it would be intolerable; then it was a page in the soul's education. Think of the sermons that have been preached; think of the mistakes committed in many instances on points of criticism; think how their authors if living to-day would revise, correct, amend, and enlarge them; think how some who were the orthodox of their day would now be ashamed of their own thoughts and productions: what of it? At the time they worked up to their opportunity, they were faithful to their opportunity; now to retain all these mistakes would not be veneration but mischievous superstition. But this must not go on. The book of Samuel could not, blessed be God, have been in the New Testament. The wars of the ancients are not in the spirit of the cross. But Providence is a long story, a serial issue, coming out in daily parts, quite a wonderful book, and should be read straight on from the beginning of the beginning up to the latest sunrise. He who reads so will be no pessimist, but will see that God's eternal purpose stands, and that the holy purpose is to make the whole world a temple, and the whole universe beautiful with holiness.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, thou art indeed a consuming fire to them that are out of the way, whose hearts are obstinate and whose will has gone wantonly from God. Thou dost fight with fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. We come to thee for mercy,—for a gentle rain of mercy, pity, compassion, love. We have done the things we ought not to have done, and all we hold in our hands is a broken law. God be merciful unto us, sinners! Speak to us from the cross: there do thou commune with our hearts, letting us whisper our sin and rather hint at our shame than tell it in plain words. We bless thee for a gospel so many-sided; it is like a thousand doors opening upon the heart of God. The prodigal is welcome: therefore are we here,—not because of our goodness and perfectness, but because our of evil and imperfection. We are here where the cross is and the speaking blood—the sacrifice for the sins of the world: a mystery even greater than our sin, and for the mystery we bless thee. To no argument would we trust, to no wall of words would we come for security and rest, but to an infinite mystery, to that which is above us like a sky, beyond us like the horizon,—something without words, putting all speech to shame and confusion because of its inadequacy to express the infinite compassion of God. Where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. Who can be greater than God? What can be vaster than his love? What can get so deeply into the nature that the all-penetrating blood of Jesus Christ cannot remove it? Wash us, and we shall be clean. Undertake for us when our strength is all gone; when our sorrow is intolerable, do thou find the solace which we need; when we are blind through tears, do thou terminate the weeping by one night's grief, that in the morning we may see a risen sun and a radiant sky. Amen.

Chapter ix.

1. And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?

2. And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he.

3. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.

4. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.

5. ¶ Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.

6. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!

7. And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.

8. And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

9. Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.

10. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

11. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.

12. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.

13. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet.

DAVID'S TREATMENT OF MEPHIBOSHETH.

THE chapter opens with a question which we should have thought at one period of our study to have been utterly impossible. There is a most subduing melancholy in the inquiry. The voice sounds as if it were being uttered in a great sepulchre. The king's own sweet music is lost in that atmosphere. The question sounds hollow, dismal, like a poor voice struggling in a cave of wind. "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul?" What do we remember of Saul? What but greatness and splendour? He was the first king of Israel; his name was famous; his warriors were victorious; his house was based upon broad and deep foundations, and the roof of it seemed to darken heaven. How great his pomp! How infinite his circumstance! Now the question is asked: "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul?" Can such a house die? Are there influences at work which can crumble the pyramids? "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away,"—a very subtle suggestion of an infinite effect operating continually in human affairs. Not, He was destroyed, torn to pieces, struck by seven thunderbolts, overwhelmed by the aggregated forces of heaven; But, He passed away like a shadow—as silently, as suggestively. Nor need we dwell upon the wickedness of Saul in applying this feature of

transitoriness to our own circumstances. We remember the disobedience of Saul, and the penalty which fell upon the king; but, apart altogether from mere rebellion or disloyalty to Heaven, it is written upon all earthly things that they are doomed, that they must fade away, that kings and mean men pass on in the same eternal procession. If questions of this kind were not asked, the heart might sometimes at least secretly wonder whether God be not really partial to the rich and strong and great. He seems to spare the tempest from their roof, and to turn away the wind when it would strike their flocks or their lives. But it is not so. With God there is no respect of persons. The lesson to us is this—that however sturdy our physical power, however large our public place, however deep our pecuniary resources, we too must decay and pass on. What are we to leave behind us? We can leave much: we can so live that the world will be the poorer for our going. It is there the lesson comes with great power, and yet with ineffable graciousness.

"That I may shew him kindness" (v. 1). Once leave David to himself, and he blossoms into wonderful grace of character. He never began a war. David was no aggressor. The shepherdly heart was David's: he began at the sheepcotes, and he never left them as to all high moral pastoral solicitude and love. He was often in war, but always challenged, provoked, defied. Other kings have sprung from their thrones and said, Whom can we fight to-day? This man sits still on his throne and says, To whom can I shew kindness? In the next chapter he will hear of a man who has lost his royal father, and he will say, "I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me." Let some men alone and then in very deed their life runs out in kindness. They sometimes indeed turn aside to do things that are not wise and good; still, they are ruled by fine high sentiment, which makes one rather mourn than curse their degradation. Not that it is to be excused. A man may add a little to his own respectability by pronouncing judgment on the errors and sins of David. But remember that again and again when the hand of pressure is taken from him he wants to be a shepherd, to do acts of kindness, to go out after that which is lost until he find it. David always saw where

another chair could be put to the banqueting-table. He observed how much food was taken away from the table that might have been consumed there by necessity, could that necessity have been discovered and urged by hospitable welcomes to partake of the feast. Wonderful human nature! sometimes so hideous that we are ashamed to belong to it. There are chapters in the Bible we cannot read aloud, and that even when we are alone we fly through rather than peruse: there are others we would read all day, and cause the sun to stand still that we might finish the tale of eloquence. This double aspect must be surveyed and realised by any who would attempt to estimate the full compass and proper value of that mysterious term Human Nature.

But can Saul or Jonathan have left any man to whom kindness can be shown? Their sons will be wealthy. The inheritance of such men must be a boundless estate. Quite a sad thing is it to be in such circumstances that nobody can do us a kindness; and sadder still to be supposed to be in such circumstances when in reality we are not. We are effusive in our kindness to people who are lying in the street; but there are many men of really radiant face, and merry life, and joyous, happy, witty speech would be glad of the help of a little child's hand. They are the men who are to be inquired about. Persons are to be glad that the question may be put to them, Where are such men? They will require to be found at twilight, for they shrink from noonday, and their gloom would make midnight a darkness impenetrable. We lose so much when we so rise in life as to think we do not need any man's solicitude or help. Better be poor than be so foolishly proud. He who does the kindness receives the larger benefit. It is more blessed to give than to receive. These are the profound maxims of Christian doctrine which every man can put to a practical test. Then who would refuse kindness even from the poorest? Take it, take it gladly—take it all. I say not that to-morrow you may not in some way "fetch a compass" which will never be suspected as to its action, and place tenfold more in the poor giver's hands. If a child offer you anything, take it—gladly, lovingly, as if you had been waiting for it all your life and now seized the chance with great thankfulness. What you are to do afterwards your own heart will tell you.

"For Jonathan's sake." It is an honest word. Not "for Saul's sake": there are some memories we cannot honour; but "for Jonathan's sake": there are some memories we can never forget. How the past lives and burns! We can never repay, in the sense of being equal with, any man who ever did us kindness. Kindness is not to be repaid, in the sense of being discharged, struck off the book of memory, and no longer constituting a pious recollection. Gratitude always says, There is room for another little flower, there is space for another genial demonstration of solicitude and sympathy. Men who suppose they have paid their benefactors are never to be trusted. We can only pay by instalments. Justice may draw a line,—gratitude stretches out a horizon. If this is so amongst men of right spirit, what is it in relation to Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, who bought the Church with his blood, and redeemed it by his unspeakable priesthood? In relation to him nothing has been given whilst anything has been withheld. We cannot pay for our salvation; silver and gold have no place in the region opened by that infinite word: they are terms unknown.

Nothing could be done for Jonathan: he had passed away; but there is always the next best thing to be done. Blessed are they whose quick ingenuity is inspired to find out the next best thing. Who does not long to have his father and mother back again, at least for one whole summer day, that he might load them with proofs of gratitude and love? They had such a weary time of it; they were but poor; they never saw splendid cities, or fine sights, or heard noble music, or looked upon things great but from a distance; they were always in the field ploughing, in the market place bartering, or in the sick-chamber suffering. To have them back one day, month, year,—a whole round year! We should live in their delight and find heaven in their contentment. Yet see to it that this sentiment, so pure, like the dew of the morning, be critically examined. The value of it will be shown by what is done now to those who are alive. We cannot do the departed any good, for they have passed beyond the human touch; but we can do deeds to the poor, the ignorant, the out-of-the-way, the suffering, which will be a happy memorial to those we have lost. Take some poor child, open its way in life, and

when you have done so set up in your heart's memory a stone bearing the inscription, "Sacred to the memory of a loving parent." So write the epitaph of the dead, and the writing shall never be obliterated. What we have to make up in this way! There are aspects of life, when we look in this direction, which simply appal us. We did not know at the time how neglectful we were. We took life roughly: the days came and went, and we paid but little heed to their inner story of detail; now that we have thought the matter over, our hearts are sore, because we see a thousand places where we might have been filial, tender, grateful, helpful, good, according to the measure of God's goodness.

"Then king David sent. . . ." (v. 5). What has David to do with such matters now? He is the king. Why should kings stoop to look after obscure subjects? Does not elevation destroy responsibility? Does not a throne excuse from human solicitude and pity? Does not a great public position exonerate a man from care for those he has left behind? The man struggles up through the king: there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. David was first a man, then a shepherd, then a king; and in proportion as he was fit to be king he cared nothing for his kingship. Only they are overwhelmed with office who are unworthy of it. The man knows within himself whether he can drive six-in-hand, whether he can control circumstances, whether he can "mount the whirlwind and direct the storm." David was worthy of his throne, and greater than his throne: he was a poet, and who can confer any favour upon a poet that will make him feel proud of mere investiture and prerogative? It is impossible. Let us keep our eyes steadfastly upon the humanity of David. He was so much of a man that he often got wrong as a man. It is a terrible thing to be too much a man. Better be limited, be just barely weight, scrupulously measured: fewer devils will assail us, fewer hells will open at our feet to swallow our ardent and all but uncontrollable life. It may be pious to sit in judgment upon David's errors, but it is at least human to remember David's goodness.

Mephibosheth was worthy, too, of his father. He quietly

accepted his degradation. He was not one of the men who had a grievance and was continually fomenting the people in order to have that grievance remedied. There was no little philosophy in Mephibosheth. He saw how history had gone; he recognised Providence in events, and he had rest in proportion as he had true piety. There are many men in obscurity who ought not to be there when looked upon from a certain point of view. They could easily establish a grievance, and bring an accusation against public policy or social justice. Mephibosheth waited until he was sent for. Joseph only got wrong in one instance, then hardly wrong; at the time we almost rejoiced in it, for it showed him to be a man after all, and not an angel—the time when he said to the prisoner who was about to be discharged, "When thou comest into thine office, remember me." He ought not to have said that. An interpreter of dreams should not be indebted to the butler of a king. Yet it is well when great men turn aside from their greatness but for one little inch, for then we can take hold of them and cry, "Brothers are we." Mephibosheth waited until he was sent for, without asking anybody to plead for him with king David. Blessed are they who can accept their fortunes, and who can call fate by the name of Providence. The great, the eternal truth underlying all this is, that there comes a time when sonship rises above accident. Mephibosheth had come to that happy time. He was Jonathan's son. True, he was lame; true, he was in an obscure position; true, he had counted himself as little better than a dead dog: but there came a time when sonship was the principal fact of his life. So it shall be in the great search which God makes in his universe for the obscure and the lost, the woebegone and the friendless. He will recognise his own image; he will remember his own creation; the very remembrance of this indeed is the explanation of the quest for lost humanity. We are still children. We are indeed broken down, but the fragments are majestic, the ruins are grand. Christ has come to seek and to save that which was lost. "Ho, every one that thirsteth," saith he, "come ye to the waters, and drink." It is said of him everywhere, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." So he does, and when he breaks their bread he shows his Deity.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, we bless thee for all uplifting of heart; its meaning is more than we can now express. We thank thee for all religious desire: for the tender longing of the heart for further light, for deeper peace and for tender communion with others. This is the miracle of grace in the heart of man. We are dissatisfied, because of the image in which we are made, with all things that are merely of the earth and of time. We can receive more than earth can give; the whole firmament is too small for us: we would see beyond, even into the higher skies where the brighter stars burn. This cometh forth from the Lord of hosts. We do not die as the beasts die; we die in hope: being rooted in the Christ and identified with all the mystery of his cross, we feel, we know, that death is not stronger than Christ; we are assured, though we cannot explain all the reason of the assurance, that we are more than earth, that we were not meant for time alone; there is a purpose divine in our very feebleness, and our infirmity shall not disguise the greatness of thy purpose respecting us. We are weighed down by many burdens. Sometimes we are befooled by our very tears, and think that tears are walls through which no man can see, barriers and boundaries, the end of things. Yet sometimes our tears are as instruments through which we can see far and read all the higher writing which now concerns us; then we bless God for our tears because they have been the medium of revelation to the soul. We would that all our life, poor, short as it is, might be spent in high uses, so that when the time of vision comes we may behold the purpose and see the answer to the mystery, and accept the destiny which grace has provided for ransomed and trustful souls. Let thy blessing be upon us in the perusal of thy word; make it a new word to us, old as eternity, yet new as our present need, far back in the infinite solitude of thine own nature, yet round about us and within us in tender and familiar companionship and conference. Thus we shall live with the patriarchs and with the prophets, with the minstrels and the apostles of Christ; and we shall know that law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, yet that Moses and Christ are one, and the song in heaven is the song of Moses and the Lamb. Amen.

2 Samuel x.

[*The greatest and most critical war in the reign of David is now about to be reported. The 60th Psalm should be read in this connection.*]

1. And it came to pass after this, that the king [Nahash] of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead.

2. Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon.

3. And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee to search the city [Rabbah, almost the only city owned by the Ammonites], and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?

4. Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards [the extremest of all personal insults], and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away.

5. When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho [in some cottage or village thereabout] until your beards be grown, and then return.

6. ¶ And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank [or had made themselves stink] before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ish-tob [this word means A good man] twelve thousand men [for which service they paid a thousand talents of silver, upwards of £125,000].

7. And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men.

8. And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Rehob, and Ish-tob, and Maacah were by themselves in the field.

9. When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians [the stronger division of the enemy]:

10. And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon.

11. And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee.

12. Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord [will] do that which seemeth him good.

13. And Joab drew nigh, and the people that were with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him.

14. And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to Jerusalem [for reasons unknown].

15. ¶ And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before Israel, they gathered themselves together.

16. And Hadarezer sent, and brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to Helam [now unknown], and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before them.

17. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam [he took the field in person]. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him.

18. And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there [and thus inflicted a crushing blow, from which the enemy did not recover during his reign or the reign of his son].

19. And when all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them [transferring their vassalage to David]. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.

TWO ASPECTS OF DAVID.

IN chapters x. and xi. we see king David at his best and also at his worst. The second verse of the tenth chapter opens almost in the same spirit as the first verse of the ninth. In both instances David is determined to "show kindness." In the first instance he would show kindness to any survivor of the house of Saul, as we have just seen, and now he will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, because Hanun's father had shown kindness to David in the old times of distress. So far we see David at his best. It is the more notable, because David is never recorded as the aggressor in any of the innumerable wars in which he was engaged; he was always the party threatened or challenged, and never the party defying and brow-beating: but in the matter of kindness he takes the initiative, not only originating the purpose as a mere sentiment, but endeavouring to carry it beneficently into effect. In estimating the character of David let this consideration be put down to his credit—namely, that in war he was never the aggressor, and that in kindness he was always the originator. In both these historical instances David acts retrospectively, in the sense that he is not proposing to show kindness to living men for their own sakes but

on account of some virtue or goodness on the part of their ancestors. A merely technical or literal nature would have been content with contemporary action,—that is to say, would not have troubled about going back into yesterday in order to honour the memory of a dead man. But even in this generous retrospection David is faithful to his poetic nature and his religious enthusiasm. It was not enough to treat a man within his own limits and boundaries for the present day, and then to dismiss him as a discharged creditor; the goodness of the man in question lived on after the man himself had physically disappeared. Is not this a noble trait in the character of king David? It should not be lightly passed over as a matter of commonplace, especially when there is in reserve for David a penetrating and heavy criticism which must not be mitigated on account of any good reputation which the king may have acquired on other occasions. Justice will at least seek to state both sides of the case, and then demand that the character be judged, not in separate aspects, but in its complete totality.

David is to be credited with good intentions in this case, as he was in the case of proposing to build the temple and to do kindness to any survivor of the house of Saul. Even good intentions have a distinctive value of their own. Sweet waters do not rise from bitter fountains. To have one good wish, one unselfish desire, one generous impulse, is to have some degree of divine influence operating upon the heart, and so far is to show that the heart has not been given over to utter reprobation. This is a comforting thought for ourselves. Are all our thoughts entirely bad? Is there not any light of unselfishness shining from any one of them? Or do we now and again feel the heart stirred to do some generous deed, or speak some word that will assuage human sorrow or lighten human burdens? Even the impulse will do us good. How were David's good intentions received by the counsellors of Hanun? We read that "the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" (x. 3). Again and again in history we come upon such

narrow-minded and rash advisers. We shall come upon them again in the second book of Kings in the instance of Rehoboam, who was brought to ruin by the suspicious counsels of foolish men. There are always persons who are ready to credit others with bad motives. According to our interpretation of the motives of others do we often reveal the true quality of our own hearts. Suspicion is more to be dreaded than simplicity. When Christian education is completed in the heart there will be a readiness to assign the best possible motives to all human action, at least in the absence of the clearest evidence to the contrary. Many men are ruined by their so-called sagacity, as well as by their want of mental pith and alacrity. These long-headed counsellors of the young king imagined that they knew human nature better than he did; they oppressed the young man by the weight of their experience; they brought to bear upon him all the influence, happy or unhappy, which ought to attach to old age and large views of human action. Whether the counsellors were young or old in point of age does not interfere with the fact that they were of malignant disposition. Had they been generous they would have led Hanun into new relations with the powerful king of Jerusalem, and of Israel, and might have established the kingdom of Hanun on stronger foundations than ever. We should always be on our guard against men who are too clever. Human nature does not lie wholly on lines of baseness; but even on the appalling suspicion that such may be the case, seldom is anything lost by accepting a generous word in a generous spirit, for in doing so even hypocrisy itself may be baffled and outwitted.

Hanun responded to the counsels of his advisers in a manner which he supposed would increase his own popularity with his subjects. He "took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle (v. 4). Noted travellers have told us that the cutting off of a person's beard is regarded by the Arabs as an indignity equal to flogging and branding amongst ourselves. It has also been made clear by travellers that the loss of their long garments, so essential to Oriental dignity, was no less insulting than that of their beards. Hanun was not one of the men who could adopt

a middle course. Without receiving the comforting words of David in the sense in which they were intended, he need not have gone to the extreme which he adopted. But some men are incapable of seeing the middle course, which is one of proverbial safety, and they imagine that they display their ingenuity and teach a useful lesson to others by adopting a policy of complete rigour. The men might have been sent back with a coldly polite reply, which would have discouraged further approach on the part of the king of Israel, or they might have been received with gladness, and thus reflex honour might have been shed upon the throne of David. But no such course opened itself before the vision of the counsellors of Hanun. They would show their greatness by humbling the messengers of David to the uttermost depths. It is little to the honour of human nature that there are not only insults which men can hurl at one another in moments of passion and defiance, but there are studied insults which are elaborated in cold blood and inflicted with a sense of enjoyment by the cruel men who have fashioned new modes of social humiliation. No doubt that night there was joy in the palace of Hanun and in the houses of his triumphant princes. They had adopted a spirited foreign policy. They were not going to receive any messages from outlying peoples which might be construed into obligations, but were going to teach the nations that whatever Nahash might have done in his effusive old age, they were determined to be known as men of rigour and men of dignity.

The insult inflicted upon Israel was not only personal, it was deeply religious. Not only was David dishonoured, but God himself was defied. In Leviticus xix. 27, we see how stringent was the law regarding this matter of shaving the head. "Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard." It is not for us to enter into the value of any such ordinances: suffice it to say that they were the distinct ordinances of the people of Israel, and as such had religious value and significance. There is a cruelty in our own day which seeks to injure men through the medium of their religious convictions. The history of Christian persecution runs wholly along this line of offence. Men have been nick-named, taunted with the peculiarity of their faith, mocked as to the

manner of their prayers, laughed at by the ruffianism of their age. To-day men are kept out of pecuniary positions because of their religious faith. Social advancement is barred to not a few persons on account of their religious convictions. Were such men without conviction, light-headed, and light-hearted, ready to adopt any form or ceremony as they might adopt a change of garments, their course in life would be much smoother; but because they are earnest, even to agony, their convictions are made into so many stumbling-blocks by which their progress is hindered.

The counsellors of Hanun the son of Nahash were too blinded by their own passion to foresee the results of their foolish policy. What was a practical jest to them was an occasion of just anger to the king whom they had insulted. It is well to take some account of the resources of the enemy before being too defiant or adopting a course of lofty superciliousness. But folly seldom sees both sides of a question. Suppose the counsellors of Hanun had asked themselves how David would regard this method of reply, possibly they might have slackened their speed in their evil course. But passion never pauses to consider the full issue of its rage. The men who carried a message to Hanun could also carry a message to David. When David was told of the event he showed once more the noble quality of his nature by delicately sending to meet the men and advising them to tarry at Jericho until their beards were grown, and then they could return (x. 5). The verse reads as if David were inclined to follow the impulse of his better feeling. Dealing with his own men, his action is conspicuous for considerateness and gentleness. Not one word of anger is introduced into this portion of the history. David would seem rather to have been ashamed with the shame of the afflicted men, and to have been so overborne by his sympathy with them as to forget the indignity which had been heaped upon him by the son of Nahash. But David's mind quickly turned to the shocking reality of the case with which he had to deal. He "sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men," and thus inaugurated his policy of revenge. It is easy for us in the midst of our Christian civilisation to point out what other course David might have adopted, but judging events by the time and atmosphere in which they occurred, it would be hard to

say that David did not adopt the only policy which could be understood by the heathen aggressor. It is a notable characteristic of the genius of history that it is always faithful to its own time. As the action of David would now be out of place as between Christian nations, so any other course than that which he adopted would have been out of place in relation to his particular injury. Read history in its own light. It is essential to adopt this canon of interpretation in reading many portions of the Old Testament; otherwise the mind will be thrown often into a state of moral bewilderment, and be ready almost to cry out against the Spirit of God.

Chapter xi.

1. And it came to pass, after the year was expired [at the return of the year], at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon [devastated the land and cut off stragglers], and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.

2. ¶ And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

3. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam [the people of God], the wife of Uriah the Hittite? [one of David's thirty chief heroes].

4. And David sent messengers, and took her [without violence]; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house.

5. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.

6. ¶ And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite [thus David would cover up his crime]. And Joab sent Uriah to David.

7. And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.

8. And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat [a present] from the king.

9. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house [in the guard chamber at the entrance of the palace] with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house.

10. And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house?

11. And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing [a noble answer].

12. And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to-day also, and to-morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow.

13. And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk [how base! how infernal!]: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.

14. ¶ And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter [not with black but with blood] to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.

15. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

16. And it came to pass, when Joab observed [blockaded] the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were.

17. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.

18. ¶ Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war;

19. And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king,

20. And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall?

21. Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

22. ¶ So the messenger went, and came and shewed David all that Joab had sent him for.

23. And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate.

24. And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and some

of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.

25. Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him.

26. ¶ And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead she mourned for her husband [the usual period, seven days].

27. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

["Several months must have passed since the beginning of David's course of sin, and as yet his conscience had not brought him to a sense of what he had done, nor had the prophet Nathan been sent to him. It is to be remembered that during all this time David was not only the civil ruler of his people, but also the head of the theocracy, the great upholder of the worship and the service of God, and his psalms were used as the vehicle of the people's devotion. If it be asked why he should have been left so long without being brought to a conviction of his sin, one obvious reason is, that this sin might be openly fastened upon him beyond all possibility of denial by the birth of the child. But besides this, however hardened David may appear to have been in passing from one crime to another in the effort to conceal his guilt, yet it is scarcely possible that his conscience should not have been meantime at work and oppressing him with that sense of unconfessed and unforgiven sin which prepared him at last for the visit of Nathan."]

This chapter reveals the character of David in its most distressing aspects. In all history can there be a blacker record than this? From end to end it is a production worthy only of the very genius of perdition. It is almost impossible to conceive that this David is the David whom we have hitherto known. His course has indeed been marked by somewhat of prevarication and duplicity, and now and again we have trembled for his integrity, but we have always felt that he was a man who, coming very near to destruction, would yet escape total ruin. Yet here he is little less than a child of the devil. His very greatness becomes the measure of his sin. All his senses are set on fire of hell. The spirit of generosity is dead within him. The spirit of justice is exiled from his nature. Falsehood, treachery, baseness hardly equalled in history, cruelty odious and detestable beyond all conceivable pitilessness, these now take possession of the king of Israel, worse spirits than troubled Israel's

first king when young David harped before him. Surely this is not the young shepherd once "ruddy, and of a fair countenance," so noble in aspect, so valiant in courage, so gifted in music, so forbearing in opposition, and so tender-hearted in his relations to Jonathan. How is the star of the morning dashed from heaven! How is the fine gold become dimmed! How are the mighty fallen! It is almost impossible to believe that this is human nature at all, so infernal is its lust, so desperate and infinite its passion. Let us not seek to excuse David. We injure the Bible, and the whole purpose of the inspired volume, if we speak so much as one word in defence of a series of actions which might have been conceived by Satan and executed within the darkness of perdition. Here is a chapter which may not be read aloud, but which is fearlessly set down in the very midst of the ancient record that it may work out some great moral issue. If we wonder why such a record should have been written, we find the answer in the character and spirit of the very Bible within which it is related. A chapter like this would have degraded any other book. But in the book of God it is right that even such chapters should be written, though they should be perused in the twilight and timidly whispered by the reader to his own listening soul. A Bible without such chapters would not have been a complete history of human nature, and such a history we certainly need if our deepest questions are to be answered, our most solemn fears to be relieved, and our brightest hopes to be realised.

The all-important sentence is the last: "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." Without that sentence the chapter would have been intolerable. From this time forth David must bear the judgment of the Lord. Do not let it be supposed that even king David could perform such a series of wrongs and cruelties, and play as skilfully on his harp as ever, and sing as jubilantly before Heaven as he ever did. If any man would point to this history as a blot upon the Bible, let him never forget that during the whole remainder of David's life he walked under the shadow of the divine displeasure. David's harp acquired a new tone after this infamy. Psalms were written by David after this great transgression which could not have

been written before its commission. Years were added to the life of the king; he was bent down under an invisible load; his face was wrinkled with grief, and his eyes were dimmed by contrite tears. How God can make a man suffer for iniquity! "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver."

We see now something of what human nature is when it is left to show itself. We are bound to go to history as the one revelation of human nature. It is in vain to invent and discuss theories of psychology; it is in vain to look upon one aspect of human nature, and to judge the whole by the part; it is in vain, too, to fix upon any given date in human history and to judge men by that standard of civilisation. The one inquiry is what men have done in their very worst moods. An answer to that inquiry will settle the whole question respecting human depravity. It is not to the point to talk of any case as extreme, the very fact that such an extreme is possible is itself a valuable consideration in this discussion. Judging ourselves by ourselves we become wise, and we comport ourselves by a regulated series of gentilities. We are bound to look at such a chapter as the first in the epistle to the Romans, if we would see what human nature is in its innermost and largest possibilities. Nor must we shrink from dwelling upon the hideous spectacle. To speak of revolted sensibilities, highly excited prejudices, and to declare that such instances are beyond the range of careful study, is simply to deprive ourselves of some of the most solid lessons of human history. We must know what sin is before we can have any adequate idea of the divine relation to it. Sin explains the cross, sin explains the atonement, sin explains Christ. If we take a superficial view of human guilt, we cannot take a profound view of the Christian gospel. What could save such a man as David in this hell of wickedness? Would some rose-water sentiment meet the occasion? Can adultery and murder be rubbed out by a mere act of forgetfulness? Is not blasphemy added to cruelty when any attempt is made to comfort a man who has

done what David did? We must find the remedy of such apostasy in the very omnipotence of God. We can be but dumb, horror-stricken and utterly confounded, before our own nature as illustrated by David, and can only wait the disclosure of any possibility which may lie within the compass of God's almightiness.

The Bible is to be judged by what God would have done, not by what man would have done. Find a single sentence which approves of David's guilt. Happily there is no such sentence in the whole record. The spirit of the Bible, therefore, is not seen in what David did, but in the judgments which followed him and darkened his day with tremendous thunder-clouds. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." From this day forth David will be tormented by new and unexpected presentations of his guilt. New appeals will address his conscience day by day. New spectres will make night hideous. The feast of the king will be troubled by a death's-head, which his eye alone can see, glaring at him through all the artificial lights of the high festival. Man is damned even upon earth. Eternal punishment is not a question of the future only, it is a question of the immediate present. No sooner has man committed the great transgression than he enters into the darkness of perdition. Let us learn something by these tragical histories. They were written for our instruction, and fools shall we be beyond all imaginable folly if we regard these records as ancient stories destitute of modern application.

PRAYER.

WHAT doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God? This is the gospel thou hast sent unto us, thou loving One, thou who dost care for oxen and lambs, for the flowers of the field and the birds of the air. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and to keep the life unspotted from the world. Thou art the God of the poor; thou art the King of the whole earth: thou carest for them that perish; thou lookest with piteous eyes upon the children of men. Thou dost spare us. Thou dost spare even forfeited lives. Thou dost not plead against us with thy great power, for who could stand before the seven thunders of God? Thou art gentle to us; thy voice is full of entreaty and sympathy and love; the tone is a tone of caressing, as if thou wouldst please us and comfort us, and bring us into thy kingdom by the gentle way of persuasion. We own this to be the case: how great, then, our ingratitude, how terrible our rebellion, that against such a God we have lifted up the hand of defiance and to such clement heavens we have sent messages of disobedience! When he was come near the city he wept over it, and said, How often would I have gathered thee: thou art always seeking to gather thy universe around thee; thou wouldst not have any stray one among all the stars—among all the least of the lives that breathe. Thou dost count thy household, thou dost number thy jewels; thine is not a reckless, an unreckoning extravagance, but a minute economy, a critical examination into lives, purposes, courses, and destinies. Thou art the Judge of the whole earth. We have been unkind to one another; we have forgotten the second commandment, because we have not heeded the first; we have not been gentle, generous, noble, forbearing, hoping all things, enduring all things, never failing; but contrariwise has been our life: a series of failures; day after day pursuing nothing, and seizing it, and finding it to be nothing, to our hearts' vexation. We have been thoughtless, if not cruel; we have not studied one another with the anxiety of love; we have been reckless; we have been without measure in our nature and judgment; we have sinned in little things; we have wearied and chafed one another when we ought to have comforted and inspired one another. We are sinners through and through; we have sought to find the link of gold, the spot of health, the gleam of light; but, lo, there is none: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. There is none that doeth good, no, not one. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. God be merciful unto us, sinners; let Jesus Christ find us, restore us, cleanse us by his priesthood, and set us among the sons of God. Make our life pure, generous, noble, rich in charity, rich in prayer. Amen.

2 Samuel xii. 1-14.

1. And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3. But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

5. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die.

6. And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

7. ¶ And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

8. And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

9. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.

10. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.

11. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.

12. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.

13. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

14. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

NATHAN'S PARABLE.

IN reading the opening words of this chapter we can have no doubt as to their authenticity. The words are these, "And the Lord sent Nathan unto David." We cannot mistake the Heaven-sent man. Wherever he is sent he carries his credentials along with him, not written with pen and ink, but so written in his face or tone or manner as to leave no doubt as to the divinity of his mission and the heavenliness of his inspiration. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." It is in vain for men to send themselves, or to imagine that they can confer any advantage upon the Christian cause on account of their own dignity, or personal renown, or social recognition in any direction. God himself must send, in his own way. The man is exalted by his mission. Though a dumb man to begin with, he waxes eloquent in God's cause; though a stammerer at the outset, he is no stammerer at the end. Is there a greater blessing known amongst us than to be brought now and again into vital association with a Heaven-sent man, whether he come as speaker or writer or private friend—a man who has in very deed a gift in prayer, a genius of sympathy, an inspiration of method and of tone, so that his gracious appeal is thrown over us ere yet we have given him full consent? Has not the world stoned its prophets, and killed them that were sent unto it? Last of all, God said—I will send my Son; they will reverence my Son—the great parabolist, the great musician, the great teacher, all led up to the great Saviour. They killed him. They recognised him as to the worthiness and mystery of his power; they thought they had found his origin, but had not; they supposed they had measured him, but their tape fell short of the infinite bulk. So they killed him whom they could not understand and perfectly follow, because following such a man meant suffering with him, dying with him, that with him they might rise again. We should soon have discovered any imposture on the part of Nathan. His very first sentence would have betrayed him. Men cannot profess to come in God's name and then speak in their own without being instantly detected. This parable is its own witness. It is not a fabric built by human hands upon

the cold earth; it is a picture or sign let down from heaven, until it comes to the eye-line and every tint of it can be perfectly discerned. We know the true poet when we hear him, at least in some of his measures and strains; if now and again he be quite beyond us—a child of the stars, a man standing in the sun—yet also he comes down and sings until we join him, falling into the same tune, carrying it home with us, repeating it and spreading it abroad like a gospel of joy. It is just so that the Book of God stands before human judgment. If there is anything else like it, let the objector produce it. That is all that requires to be done. If there is anywhere a finer literary touch, a more consummate judgment of human life in all its bearings and outlooks, a finer criticism of human motive and character, all the critic has to do is to produce it. This parable of Nathan's stands up before us a thing unrivalled in beauty, complete as a dew-drop, fragrant as a flower, yet—for the figure may be changed even without violence—a picture painted in the sky. If there is anything superior to it our only desire is to know where it is and to look upon it. And what is true of the parable is true of the whole revelation in which it stands—a revelation unique in all the elements that constitute simplicity, beauty, majesty, divinity. But what is a parable unless it be the larger fact? A parable is not mere poetry of words but poetry of interpretation of facts. Fiction has well been declared to be the larger truth. There are some who have no opinion of fiction: simply because they are blind, incomplete, ignorant men; men who do not know what they are talking about. Fiction is the completion of fact; fiction is the sky of thought. The holy book is full of this kind of imaginative teaching—teaching that could only be taught as a subtle yet sublime appeal to the imagination. Let us then look at the parable as based upon fact.

There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds: the poor man had one ewe lamb. And the rich man, in a case of emergency, instead of taking a lamb out of his own flock, killed the one ewe lamb of the poor man. If that never occurred we must know it. Did it ever occur? It is the thing that is occurring every day. It is the infinite danger of wealth that it becomes oppressive,

cruel, thoughtless, selfish. To say that it always becomes so would be to go contrary to the most gracious facts with which we are acquainted—would be to utter that which is not only unjust but absurd. There is a sanctified wealth; there is a gracious social position; there is a condescending royalty. But why should it be remarked that such should be the case? Simply because of the almost innate tendency of men to use wealth with cruelty and with selfishness. The poor man feels the cold wind first. The destruction of the poor man is his poverty. There are men who are poor to-day who are better than any king that ever reigned upon the earth. Wealth when it oppresses carries with it its own condemnation. Wealth when it is used as a means of succouring men, helping the true and the good—ay, and sometimes throwing a handful even to men whose characters are not beyond suspicion—is doing the work of God; and that it is often doing so is patent to us, and is a theme of gratitude and rejoicing. Who does not sometimes impose upon poverty? Who dares start a mission for the conversion of the rich? Is there such a mission amongst all the institutions of the day? It may be but sheer arrogance, the most pitiable impertinence, to open the poor man's door and thrust upon him attentions which he has no wish to cultivate. Who can go to the high, and charge them across their wine-drinking with being adulterers, idolaters, wicked men? It is so cheap a virtue to preach to the poor, to take a part in urging upon what are termed "the masses" certain religious convictions,—all that ought to be done; all that may be beautifully done; that is being done to-day with great and happy effect by men who know how to use great powers without undue urgency or the very appearance of oppressiveness: but there is something more to be done. The rich man is in danger of becoming a fool. Who can carry wealth in both hands without feeling that the earth is his, and that all men ought to obey him? That such a miracle has been wrought we must always most thankfully acknowledge. Some of the most modest, gracious, tender-hearted men known to us are men of almost incomputable wealth. But we are dealing with something below all that we now know as personal facts—namely, with principles, mysteries, with that whole region, almost undiscovered, of motive, passion, impulse that never can be explained adequately in words. On

the other hand, a man is not necessarily a virtuous citizen because he has only one ewe lamb. Let us be impartial. In the Church of God no preacher must bow before either one class or the other; nor must he spare the pulpit when he speaks in God's name, even though he himself be the first to perish under the thunder of righteous judgment. The preacher is not a mere personality when he stands with open book before him in the sanctuary of God: being faithful to his vocation, he speaks the things that ought to be done, though he convict himself of inconsistency in every syllable he utters. Let it not, therefore, be established as a primary notion amongst us that because a man is poor therefore he is good. Some poor men would be worse men if they were rich. Some of us may even have to thank God in eternity that to get a mouthful of honest bread was the daily difficulty of our earthly life. This is a two-sided subject, and all that can be done is for every man, whichever side of it he may be upon, to examine himself and guard himself, for the severer he is upon himself the gentler will he be in judging other men.

Look at the parable as a method of teaching. The parable was a favourite educational instrument in Eastern nations. There were many parable-makers in Oriental lands, and people have in all ages listened to parables as they have never listened to merely didactic or instructive discourse, partaking of the dry nature of information only, without picture, or poetic sign. But where are the parables equal to those which are to be found in the Bible? Balaam had a parable, Jotham had a parable,—these we have already studied; Nathan has a parable, and others in the Old Testament now and again come very near to the line of parable, but in proportion as we discover the parable to be beautiful and true we see in it the Spirit of the living God—the Eternal Force—the Divine Quantity. But when we come to the teaching of Jesus Christ all the other parables fall off into dim perspective; and after he laid down that instrument was it ever taken up again? Was Paul a teacher by parable? He had a great mind—a majestic, temple-like mind, but could he paint as Christ painted, or poetise after the manner of the Son of God? Does he not struggle with his great argument? Is he not a man in tortures and paroxysms, complaining in his very majesty of

reasoning of his weakness and inadequateness? He totters under the weight he tries to carry. And John—sweet, loving man, uttering many things most memorable and quotable—when did he teach as Christ taught? This was the method of the Saviour, and he adopted it oftentimes, because it led to men convicting themselves without their being able to fix any particular accusation upon the speaker. Jesus Christ often fetched a compass—as we read respecting the attack made upon the Philistines—and he fetched it by such a sweep, by such a reach of mind, that the men upon whom his attention was fastened little suspected, until after the completion of the parable, that they were the objects of his judgment and condemnation. This is masterly preaching—to be personal without the individuals knowing that we are such; to get up a whole statement, coloured in every hue of heaven, sharp with all the pungency of criticism, and for men afterwards to wake up to the fact that the preacher was meaning none other than themselves. Such wondrous sermons did Christ preach that men took them home, began to apply them to other people, and finding the unfitness of such a procedure, began to wonder what the meaning was, and then started up in offence because they had been impleaded, accused, transfixed. What applies to Christ's parables, and to all others of the same quality, applies to the whole revelation of God. It is in very deed every man's book—a special message sent to every reader. Whilst the Gentile is thinking that the judgments of God upon the Jews were well-deserved, lo! the thunder breaks upon his own ear, and the lightning plays before his own vision, and the stroke of God is heavy upon him. The Bible is the universal book. It is written in the universal language. It comes to every man straight from the heart of God.

Look at this parable as a practical revelation, first, of God's justice. We have seen that the thing which David did "displeased the Lord." We have insisted that wherever the sin is quoted against David the judgment should be quoted in favour of the Bible. We may continue to add to our denunciation of David's guilt page after page of scathing criticism and condemnation, and yet never touch all that God meant when he set the seal of dis-

pleasure upon the man who was after his own heart. If David had been blessing others less sweetly, he would have been unable to sin so grievously. None can fall so far as an angel of God. Does God treat the sin lightly? He says: "The sword shall never depart from thine house;" across every bright summer that shines upon thee there shall be a great bar of blackness; when the birds sing to thee thou shalt be constrained to punctuate their song with memories of remorse; when thou dost lift the flagon to thy lips the wine shall leave behind it a poisonous taste; when thou liest down a thorn shall puncture thee: thou shalt never escape from this deed of wickedness. Whilst, therefore, the mocker is eager to quote as against the Bible the sin of David, if he be a just man as well as a jiber he ought to quote the judgment pronounced by God, and to see how true is the doctrine of eternal torment even in relation to this life. All punishment is for ever and ever. It is not a time-quantity. It is not an arithmetical sum. Time speaks in great numbers, but this suffering requires the mysterious words "for ever and ever" to define its quality and scope.

This parable, too, shows us man's responsibility. David is not allowed to escape on the ground of being overtaken in a fault. Kings ought to be their own subjects. The greater the man, the greater should be the saint. The greater the opportunities we have had of education and culture of every kind, the severer should be public criticism upon our lapses and iniquities. To whom much has been given, from him shall much be expected. He who knoweth his Lord's will and doeth it not shall be beaten with many stripes. If we would know what fall means—apostasy, lapse from high privilege and intimate communion, ask not man, but ask "the angels who kept not their first estate."

Now we cannot but pity David—that the sword is within him, and that God is turning it round as by the handle that it may give him added pain—pain but too well deserved. A scene that will never leave the vision of the world is that which describes David's relation to the dying child and the child when dead. We could almost forgive him for his very love. A most rational course the poet took in his sorrow:—"'While the child was yet

alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me?' He is so gracious; he has so often forgiven me: he has seventy times seven exercised his pardon towards me, and I said, Who can tell whether after this consummation of my wickedness 'God will be gracious to me, that the child may live;' he is always first to repent; the tears are in his eyes before they are in the eyes of the sinner, and I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, remember that I am dust, and have pity upon me, and may yet even spare the child? 'But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.'" Even our sorrow must be governed. We must be rational in our uttermost griefs. Here is the way in which a man may deport himself under the severest visitations of God. Sorrow may be turned into idolatry. He is the most filial who, seizing the idea of Providence, answers it with obedience, resignation, and even with some measure of thankfulness, not always to be uttered at once, but by a promise of a hymn that shall one day be sung, and sorrow shall be turned into joy. Why did we not pity David and forgive him on the spot? Because there is in the universe a wronged man—a murdered man. Sentiment must be watched, or it may be turned into a kind of miserable superstition. We pity the criminal, and will not flog the man of violence: we forget the man whom he slew or injured, the undeserved sufferer, the murdered one. No; David, though a harper and a psalmist and the darling of Israel, must not be pardoned yet. Society owes something to the murdered man. David shows great beauty of character, great tenderness of spirit, but he shows it too late. We must not be deceived by the tears of the poet. They are genuine tears; no question can be thrown upon the sincerity of the man; this is human nature at its best —the "one touch of nature" that "makes the whole world kin:" but only yesterday, as it were, this man killed a valiant soldier and a faithful friend. He must be well held over the pit. As for those who have been murdered, slain, injured, we must leave them with God. He is a God of justice: they shall have their compensation. Yet David will be pardoned, for there is a way out of the greatest darkness; there is a road out of the deepest midnight, that leads right up towards morning: there is a fountain

opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness; "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Let none despair! some ought indeed to create a hell for themselves, so bad has been their life from the first moment to the last. Yet the gospel of Christ is nothing if it do not include within its music all the children of men, of every hue and form,—sinners of every degree of turpitude. Herein the gospel magnifies itself: where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. It is not for us to exclude any man from gospel hope. The church ought to be the place where the music of hope is played and sung; the church ought to be a house of hope and love and gratitude; the Christian pulpit ought to be the place where, after judgment has been pronounced, the word of hope should be declared—sounded as upon a silver trumpet; and the message of mercy should be delivered in merciful tones, and the offer of pardon made with the pathos of a soul which has itself been pardoned.

SELECTED NOTE.

That David was a man of ardent passions, and that he gratified these sometimes with the arbitrary license of an Oriental prince, lies on the surface of the record of his life. But men do ill to measure that heroic and many-stringed nature by the average standard of commonplace humanity; and it is foolish and wicked to dwell upon his obvious faults while no regard is paid to the nobler features of his soul, to the sublime piety in which his habitual life dwelt, to the intense agony with which he struggled for the mastery over these fiery passions, and the mournful remorse with which he bewailed their occasional triumph over his better nature. Some have even taken occasion from the sins into which David fell to sneer at the religion of which he appears as one of the most distinguished professors; forgetting how unfair and disingenuous it is to impute to a man's religion what his religion had nothing to do with, except as it caused him frequently and constantly to deplore it. It behoves us also to consider of how much good to the Church David's varied experiences, even in their least excusable forms, have been made the vehicle. Though we neither excuse his acts of wickedness nor impute them to the temptation of God, who cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth any man, we will add that by his loss the Church hath gained; and that if he had not passed through every valley of humiliation and stumbled upon the dark mountains, we should not have had a language for the souls of the penitent, or an expression for the dark troubles which compass the soul that feareth to be deserted by its God.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, thy command is our law. We would hear a voice in our ear saying day by day, This is the way, walk ye in it. We would have a heart so prepared by thy grace that it would instantly answer, "In no other way will we walk, for this is the path of God." Then should we walk where the ways are ways of pleasantness, and where the paths are peace, and where the road is a line going upward evermore through cloud and noise into brightness and rest. Oh that our life were so ordered that we might take no step of ourselves: that we might learn to stand still and see the salvation of God! We have learned in some measure to walk, to run, but not to stand. Do thou attemper and chasten us, giving us to feel that in sweet obedience is the perfection of faith, and that to stand still is all we are asked to do. Behold, thou wilt show wondrous things to them who close their eyes. Thou wilt bring great satisfactions to hearts that do not hinder thee by impatience; thou wilt ennoble the life that trusts thee and takes nothing into its own mean care. Thou art making our bed at night-time, and arranging all the morning light for us, setting our table as our hunger returns. Thou art finding for us water in the desert, and a tabernacle in sandy places; yea, thou art building in the wilderness a thing fit for heaven. This is God's love; this is the divine miracle; this is the Lord's supreme wonder. Thou hast given us the cross, a cross of sacrifice, a cross of blood, full of meaning we cannot penetrate, full of pathos which melts our heart. It is lifted up to the Rock of Righteousness; it rises into the rain-clouds of the divine compassion; it stretches itself across the universe; it would bar the downward way; it would open a door into Heaven's pardon and peace. For the cross, the Lord be blessed; for the atonement, we would praise him through unending time. Amen.

2 Samuel xiii.

THE WICKEDNESS OF AMNON.

NO other book but the Bible dare have inserted such a chronicle as this and yet have hoped to retain the attention and confidence of the whole world through all ages. A chapter of this kind is not to be read in its singularity, as if it stood wholly alone and unrelated to other currents of human

history. Coming upon it as an exceptional story, the only possible feeling is one of intense and repugnant disgust. If this chapter, and a few others almost like it, occupied any considerable space in the Bible, without being relieved by a context of a very different quality, they would certainly and properly wreck the fortune of the whole book as a public instructor and guide. The only thing which a Christian commentator can do with such chapters is to pronounce upon them the utmost possible moral condemnation. But in doing this, let it be noted what is in reality being done, for the condemnation does not relate to Amnon the son of David alone. Amnon did not represent a human nature different from our own. It must always be considered that such men as Amnon and Judas Iscariot represented the very human nature which we ourselves embody.

It would be curious to measure the exact difference in distance between Amnon and the Pharisee who justified himself in prayer, according to the parable given by Jesus Christ. From the outside the distance would seem to be little less than infinite. It would be curious also, in the same direction of thought, to compare Judas Iscariot with the elder brother of the prodigal son, and to estimate, as it were, in moral miles the distance between the one and the other. But it is exactly in such comparisons that a deadly sophism lies. Comparing ourselves with ourselves, we become respectable, but the comparison does not lie as between one man and another, it lies wholly as between human nature according to the purpose of God and human nature as self-depraved. Again and again we have had occasion to stop and look at cases of monstrous iniquity, and to point out that they are always to be regarded as but exemplifications of what human nature is innately and universally. It is indeed horrible to imagine that some young fair child is to be compared with Amnon the son of David, who outraged every moral sensibility and shocked the deepest instincts of human nature; but such a comparison must be made, and all its consequences must be accepted. The difference between the sweet child and the corrupt and infernal Amnon may in reality be but a difference in appearance and form. Time alone can tell what

is in every human heart, and not time only, for circumstances sometimes awaken either our best selves or our worst selves and surprise us by what is little less than a miracle of self-revelation. Again and again, therefore, let it be said—for the tediousness is well compensated by the moral instruction—that when we see the worst specimen of human nature we see what we ourselves might have been but for the restraining grace of God. The Bible was bound to report even such instances as these. Any Bible that excluded examples of this kind could not have been inspired by the living and holy God. It would have been a mere artist's book, filled with beautiful instances and charming specimens and tempting examples, but would have been no revelation of the human nature which Jesus Christ shed his blood to redeem.

A relieving feature in the whole record is certainly to be found in the anger which was felt in regard to the outrage committed by Amnon. Here again we recover our balance and take hope even of degenerate human nature. The outrage was not looked upon as a mere commonplace, or as a thing to be passed by a casual remark; it aroused the infinite indignation of Absalom, and in this case Absalom, as certainly as Amnon, must be taken in a representative capacity. The sinner himself, inspired by evil passion and overburdened by cruel and infernal forces, is really hardly master of himself in some crises of life. Judgment is deposed, conscience is silenced, all holy feeling is expelled from the heart, and the whole man rushes upon his destruction with fury that cannot be restrained. Whilst, therefore, it is right to look upon this most heart-rending and discouraging aspect of human nature, it is right also to remember that those who observed it answered the unholy deed with burning indignation. It is thus that the Spirit of God reveals itself through the spirit of man. This is not the voice of Absalom alone; it is the voice of the Spirit which fills and rules the world. We need men who dare express their angriest and holiest feelings in indignation that cannot be mitigated or turned aside; we need men who have courage to go forth and make their voices heard in moral darkness. It is not enough to feel outraged and shocked; in addition to this feeling there ought to be a respon-

sive judgment and condemnation. It is difficult indeed to restrain violence under such circumstances. The necessary effect of sudden and ill-regulated feeling is to inflict vengeance upon the criminal. We should always distinguish between vengeance and just punishment. Herein is seen the advantage of Christian civilisation. It is no rude justice that is dispensed, but measured and calculated penalty, sometimes all the heavier for its apparent moderateness, and all the more useful because of the coolness with which it is pronounced and executed. Not in anger but in love God punishes those who outrage his righteousness. Not in anger but in love Jesus Christ dies to save the world. Absalom killed Amnon, and killed him in a somewhat cowardly way; yet it would be difficult to blame Absalom for this act of fraternal reprisal and justice. Still, it is just at such critical points that the spirit of Christian civilisation intervenes and undertakes to do for the individual man what the individual man must not be permitted to do for himself. Here is the mystery of society. It would seem a short and easy method for every man who is outraged immediately to cause the criminal to suffer, but on second thoughts it will appear, first, that this is impossible, and, secondly, that it is utterly impracticable: impossible because in many cases the criminal may be stronger than the man who has been outraged, and impracticable because the criminal may by many cunning methods evade the punishment which the righteous man would inflict. It is better that society be inspired with the spirit of order and of justice, and that every man should feel himself called upon to act as if he himself were directly involved in the suffering and shame inflicted by wicked criminals. In this sense society itself would become a kind of hell to the evil-doer. Nowhere will the evil-doer feel himself to be welcome; everywhere will the evil-doer know that he is watched, suspected, despised, and hated. Hence the infinite benefit of such teaching and example as shall constitute society into an indissoluble and ever-sitting tribunal for the judgment of guilty men. There must of course be special magistracies and technical methods of proceeding to visit punishment upon the wrong-doer, but these should only express the innermost spirit and feeling of society at large. In fact, there can be no punishment of an orderly and permanent kind that is not supported by

the spirit of society as a whole. Once let the social spirit be rendered careless regarding right and wrong, justice and injustice, and it will be simply impossible to maintain anything like technical order and right. At this point, therefore, will be seen the benefit of all Christian instruction as given through the medium of the family, the church, the school, and the press. Such instruction helps to purify social thought and social feelings, and in that degree inflicts terror upon men who would secretly or openly perpetrate that which is forbidden. To this end what can render such help as can be rendered by Holy Scripture? Holy Scripture can render that help all the more completely that it does not shrink from making such records as this. The sword is never to be sheathed as against evil. God will never allow peace to be proclaimed where there is no righteousness. The throne of God is established upon truth and purity, and whatever assails either the one or the other arrays against itself all the majesty and terror of that uplifted throne. These records are written not only for our instruction but for our warning. The most puristic mind may well pause before the record of this chapter and wonder as to his own possibilities of apostasy. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Be sure your sin will find you out." What is done in secret is to be proclaimed from the house-tops, and a sudden light is to unveil that which is supposed to be covered by the densest concealment. Society would be rent in twain by the very suspicion that there may be Amnons within its circle, but for the conviction that the Lord reigneth, and that all things make for righteousness and justice under his beneficent rule.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we pray for one another, and take up the words of old time, for they fit our immediate necessity. Thy servants have prayed all the prayers the race can ever dream of: no want has been unexpressed, no hymn has been withheld. We can add nothing to the experience of thy saints; behold, we are as they were in the ancient time; their sorrow is our sorrow, their praise expresses our thankfulness, and their upliftings of heart are our aspirations. Behold, thy Church is one, and saintly experience is one, and the confidence of all thy people from end to end of the world is one. Blessed be thy name for this sense of unity, this completeness and integrity: for therein we see the handiwork of him who made the firmament and set the stars in their places. The house is one, though the mansions are many; and thine hand is round about all things, keeping them in order, and shaping them towards their destiny. We come to thy throne by the way of the cross: by Jesus Christ, who is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: he is the eternal Son: born or unborn, he was ever in the bosom of the Father. So we come by the way made manifest, but not invented for our use alone: it is the open way, the disclosed and avowed path, the historical road, but still expressing the mystery of thine eternity, the secret of thine everlasting love. Hear us at the cross: for there may men pray with effect; there they hear the Lord's own sweet prayer, concluding with the words, Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done. May this be our state of mind always; may our will be slain; may our wish or desire stand for nothing, but may thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Comfort us in all our sorrows: they are many, they are often heavy, they sometimes come unexpectedly, our whole outlook is darkened by them as by a thunder-cloud; but all things are under thine hand; thou wilt not allow any temptation to engulf us: with every temptation thou wilt find a way of escape. We look, therefore, with confidence to the living God, and without doubt or fear. Shine upon the eternal word: help us to hear with our souls the eternal music, and may we be confident in this one thing, that, come night or morning, winter or summer, the throne of the Lord standeth sure, and his covenant cannot be broken. Amen.

2 Samuel xiv.-xviii.

ABSALOM.

THESE chapters are full of men who reveal human nature in its best and its worst aspects. What plots and counter-plots are here! What hypocrisy, and what unfeigned sorrow!

The whole world is in these few chapters in miniature. What action, what colour, what passion, what cunning! But where the crowd is so great, discrimination is the more necessary. Let us, then, discriminate between those who serve God and those who serve him not.

In chapter xiv. we have a picture of Absalom:—

"But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight" (25, 26).

The ancients, and in particular the Orientals, were very fond of remarking upon a man's height. Their notion was that the greater the stature the more fit the man was for the society of the gods. The Old Testament is to a large extent a book which takes notice of outward features, and praises physical excellence, and estimates at high price all material blessings. A man was to have "a land flowing with milk and honey" for his heaven. He was to have innumerable children in token of God's blessing. His flocks and his herds were to be without reckoning, and were to be regarded in all their fulness as a sign that God well-approved the man's life and purpose. Length of days was the only immortality then thought of. But what an irony there is in such a case as Absalom's! Given, a grand physique and a little soul, and say if any irony can be more ghastly and humiliating. To observe the right noble figure is to have expectation excited, if the man is about to do anything in a public way. Looking at him before he comes to his task we weigh him and measure him and estimate him, saying, From such a man great things may be rationally expected: when he speaks he will speak argumentatively, sympathetically, luminously, and edifyingly. But what if the very first sentence should show that some kind of mistake has been made in the putting together of the two parts of the man? Instantly we detect the discrepancy. We cannot be deluded. We say, There is a want of harmony here. But whilst that may be in some degree explained from a merely intellectual point of view, the grosser irony, the fouler

discrepancy, is this—that from a kingly-looking man we may have beggarly actions; from a body that looks like a temple we may receive confirmation strong that God is absent, that the soul is spiritually or morally dead. Such contradictions we are to ourselves sometimes, and to one another. Our circumstances may be the best part of us: the house may be greater than the tenant; the furniture may be more worthy than its owner. What, then, is to be done? A blot like this ought not to be tolerated. Wherein a man is conscious that he represents this irony, he should look about him, and say that to-day shall end the intolerable disharmony, and at least seek to introduce a reconciliation as between the outward and the inward, so that the soul may prosper and be in health as the body, or the body may prosper and be in health as the soul, according to the special circumstances of each individual case. A miserable thing too is it that one should hear nothing about a man but his beauty, his stature, his hair,—little petty peculiarities and personalities. The Old Testament, and indeed the New, is full of men who were known, as we have again and again seen, by little things: as, for example, the man about whom we remember only the size of his bedstead; the giant whose staff is compared to a weaver's beam; the man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, and—died! If we are to be known, within a little circle or a large one, let it be for some excellence, genuine kindness, bright charity, brotherly helpfulness, so that when we depart there may not only be a figure removed that men remark upon either for its littleness or its greatness, but a soul gone that was as bright as a summer morning, kind as a harvest-day.

Absalom having been for a long time voluntarily or involuntarily exiled from the capital, came back again as the result of a very cunning intrigue on the part of Joab. But Joab would not come to see him. For two whole years Absalom was left to do what he could with his own society—he "saw not the king's face" (xiv. 28). He sent for Joab, but Joab would not come. Then what did he do? Here he showed that if he was without wisdom, he was not without craft and sagacity of a certain narrow and penetrating kind:—

"Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?" (xiv. 30, 31).

Thus we get a taste of the quality of men. For two whole years Joab paid no attention to the returned son of David, but the moment his barley-field was set on fire he paid Absalom a visit of inquiry. It was crafty on the part of Absalom. Perhaps he looked upon it as a last resort and thought the end would justify the means. But there is a spiritual use of this incident which is well worth considering. We do not strain the text when we get out of it such spiritual uses. Is it not so that when we will not go to God lovingly, voluntarily, he sets our barley-fields on fire, saying, Now they will pray? We desert his church, we abandon his book, we release ourselves from all religious responsibilities; God calls, and we will not hear; then he sets all the harvest in a blaze, and we become religious instantaneously. Or he sends the cold east wind to blow upon the earth day and night, week after week; then we begin to consider whether we had not better appeal to his mercy and beseech the exercise of his clemency. Though Absalom had no such gracious intent in view, yet it is lawful to learn a lesson even from an enemy and from a man who turns the events of life to practical purpose. We are the richer if we have lost a barley-field, and found the God of the harvest. He will make up the barley-field to us, if so be we accept the providence aright, and say, This is God's thought concerning us—severe outwardly, a temporary loss, but concealing wondrous solicitude, expressing a purpose of love in a flame of fire; let us arise, and go to our father, and say to him across the blazing field, "Father, we have sinned." Those who will not come at the voice of love may be constrained to come at the bidding of terror.

We wonder how a man so beautiful as Absalom will deport himself in the practical affairs of life; and we are not permitted to wonder long, for in chapter xv. 1-6 the answer is given.

"And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him" (xv. 1).

Where is personal beauty now? Mark the insidious progress. "Absalom prepared him chariots and horses," but we have seen

that they were forbidden in Israel. Egyptians and Assyrians and the heathen nations might boast themselves of their iron chariots and their strong horses, but Israel was to have neither the one nor the other. This is the first time we read of chariots and horses in connection with Israel. This man is determined to make a very showy appeal to the public imagination. He will take that imagination captive. When the children of Israel see this innovation they will think it justified, because it was originated by the king's son; and there is something in men, including the children of Israel, that responds to great chariots, to rushing horses whose necks are clothed with thunder; and Absalom knows enough of human nature to know that this appeal will not be lost upon people who asked for a king that they might be like the other nations of the earth. They would have a king, and God says, You shall have enough of them! God sometimes overanswers the prayers of people. He says in effect: You want kings—or one king? The answer is: We want a king—one king. God says: You shall have a hundred kings; you shall have kings until you are surfeited with them; I will keep up the supply of kings, and ply you at every point. Verily, he gives men their desire and sends leanness into their souls.

"And Absalom rose up early" (xv. 2). Ambition is not a long sleeper. A man who has made up his mind to conquer the world can easily conquer himself—so far as to get up quite early in the morning. This was a bid for popularity, as well as an expression of energy. We admire this. He means it. He is no sluggard. He does not begin his day at twelve o'clock: he looks out for the sun, and almost chides that rising light, saying,—I have been watching for thee: how long thou hast tarried! If men can get up early in the morning to do that which is traitorous, unholy, and unworthy, are the servants of the living God to be sleeping away their opportunities? "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down." Saith the sluggard, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." Thus his poverty comes as one that travelleth, and his want as an armed man. We

should be more energetic, more passionate; we should recall enthusiasm; for religion dead, is irreligion. Let the cunning and crafty man for a time have his way; his policy is worthy of him, and is a thing to be admired for its astuteness and adaptation of means to ends.

"And it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!" (xv. 2-4).

The eternal speech of the mere demagogue! Bad men have no originality; they are like their father, the devil, who has only one lie and keeps repeating it through all the ages: it is the same lame story; the same poor, earthly selfish appeal; the same base, narrow villainy; the same rag that is held out as if it were a purse that contained all earth's gold. And men run after it. Who has not misled the people by making them great promises which could never be redeemed? Have we not known man after man stand up as upon a pedestal and say, "Friends, what you want is——" and then came a glowing programme authorised only by the signature of the unknown speaker. He would divide the land, and apportion the gold, and settle the hours of labour, and create an earthly paradise, and open a public road to heaven. Falsehood is not scrupulous: it abounds in flattering promises, all of which are to be realised without any toil or labour on our part! That circumstance should at once doom such promises to contempt. There is no position upon earth worth having, except as the result of labour, the prize of training, the crown of honest capability or industry. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth to any kingdom that is everlasting and blissful;—wide the gate, broad the road, leading to destruction—an infinite turnpike down to hell! Believe not those who come with paper programmes only: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God," and the test is this: self-denial, payment for all you have, an honest *quid pro quo*, a fair commerce and barter, honest wages for honest toil. But people who have grievances or grudges or

controversies are in a temper of mind which prepares them to hear the speeches of the Absaloms of the ages: they are in immediate necessity, and on the ground of the proverb "Any port in a storm," they may be glad to avail themselves of any promise that is large enough and reckless enough.

Then how he flattered his suitors and invested his affections:

"And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him" (xv. 5).

O this counterfeit fraternity—this calculated affection—this prostitution of holy instinct and noble impulse to selfish purposes; this is human nature:—timid, tender, retiring man, this is thy nature! We cannot get rid of the responsibility of what Absalom did. We cannot shake our robes and say, We have no part or lot with this man: accidentally we have not, but naturally, genically, going right back to birth or origin, we are one with him. "There is none righteous; no, not one;" "All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way;" "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." These historical characters are mirrors, looking into which we see the ghastliness of our own image.

Now came the open revolt; now the king left his palace and became a wanderer. David saw the day was darkening, and he hastened away, saying,

"Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom; make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. . . . And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off" (xv. 14-17).

See how David is beginning to suffer. He was told that the sword should never depart from his house because of the murdered man. The man was buried, but his grave reeked as a hidden furnace. We cannot bury murdered men, so that the soil shall lie quietly on their dead breasts and make no sign. It is well that the king should be thus punished. Banish him, strip him, smite him with rods of iron, O ye holy angels: for this is just. See what sin comes to:—

"And all the country wept with a loud voice; and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. . . . And David

went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up weeping as they went up" (xv. 23-30).

This comes of murdering Uriah! "The way of transgressors is hard." When we have wept our sympathetic tears over banished king David, let us go down to the grave of the valiant Uriah—the honest and ill-used soldier—and cry still more copiously over his dishonoured body. It is right that David's harp should be broken, that David's throat should be choked, and that for songs he should have groaning and distress. God takes care of his law; man cannot sin against it without being made to feel the penalty of justice.

And David weeps as he goes up by mount Olivet. We cannot but pity David now and again. He was a noble soul—he was a poet. When the devil gave him breathing space he said beautiful things, and purposed charitable actions. Perhaps we may never pity David more than when his punishment took the form of humiliation (xvi. 5-14).

"And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came" (xvi. 5).

There may be dignity in some cursing. There we do not pity king David. But in the sixth verse a new phase is revealed of the bitterness of his humiliation:—"And he [Shimei] cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: . . . and thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned" (xvi. 7-8). This was right. Humble him still more; throw stones at him, spit upon him, mock him! It is right that society should thus take up the cause of dead men. David knew this. The people asked if they might not go over and take off the head of Shimei; but David said, "No; 'let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David;' wait: this is right: by-and-by 'it may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.'" A man knows his punishment is just. So "Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw

stones at him, and cast dust;" and the object of all this violent derision was the darling of Israel! "The way of transgressors is hard." Do not tempt the living God; do not come within the sweep of his sword or within the rush of his thunder. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." This would be the end of sin upon the earth but for the great evangelical provision—but for the cross of Christ, the Saviour of the world. It is well to see what sin really comes to—to watch the black harvest grow, and to be made to go into the field with the sickle and begin to cut it down. But there is still mercy with God, but it is mercy through righteousness; there is compassion in heaven, but it is compassion that expresses law. God can now be just, yet the justifier of the ungodly. He can now forgive thieves, murderers, and the worst of men of every phase and type, but he can only do this because of the priesthood of his own Son. A mystery we cannot explain; but we feel our need of it when we feel the agony of sin and the justness of our punishment. This cross is not to be taken to pieces, and explained in literal words, and made easy to the common understanding: "Great is the mystery of godliness." Our intellectual eyes cannot see it, our vain imagination cannot bear the glory, but when we are stricken down because of sin, and penitent because we have felt its distress and abominableness in the sight of God, then something within us—yea, the very soul—catches a glimpse of the cross—the beginning of heaven, because beginning of pardon.

Whilst we must be severe upon David, and therefore upon ourselves—for David was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, only exceptionally sinful in the accident, not in the essence and reality of things—it is right also to turn in the other direction, and ask, Is there any pity in heaven? Is there any compassion in God? Is there any way of escaping the results of iniquity? And whilst we ask the question, a great voice, a voice as of many waters, sounds, and resounds, saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon;" so, though there is terrible law, there also is a gracious gospel.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, we rejoice that thou hast promised to slay the prince of this world. We cannot understand his existence. but we can attest it. He is a murderer from the beginning, and a liar; but he is under thy control: for there is but one living and true God. We know nothing of time; we cannot tell what happened in the world's Yesterday; we dimly remember what happened in our own. We cannot tell what the world's To-morrow will be, except through thy gracious revelation: it is to be a Sabbath day, a day of the Son of man, a period cut out of the glory of heaven. This is enough to know. We are glad to know it, for the night is heavy upon us; there is no message from the darkness; our sight leads us but to despair. But through our faith thou dost send us gospels, pure as dew, radiant as light, glad as music. The whole earth shall be filled with the glory of God. We wonder at the time it takes—long, long time; but then we cannot tell what time is: we go only by our mechanism and our own consciousness: we have yet to learn that there is neither thousand years nor one day to the Lord, that all such misleading definitions are unknown in the economy of heaven. Help us to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him, knowing that he will give us our heart's desire, if that desire be that his kingdom should come, and his will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. For all religious comfort we bless thee. Other comfort fades and perishes in the using, but this tender solace reaches the whole life, subdues and delights the whole spirit: it is the very comfort of God—the very grace of the cross of Christ. We would open our hearts to receive it; we would be no longer disquieted and tossed to and fro as if living in an uncontrollable tumult: we would rest in the living God; we would say, The Lord reigneth: the Lord doeth all things well: all things work together for good to them that love God; and repeating these great assurances, our joy will return, and the peace of God will make us calm. Let thy mercies be daily multiplied towards us according to our need. May every heart feel the nearness of God and know the preciousness of Jesus Christ, and witness to the sanctifying energy of the Holy Spirit. Then, come what may—high hills, or deep, long, weary valleys—the road will all lead to one place—the city whose walls are jasper and whose streets are gold. Amen.

2 Samuel xvii.-xix.

FINE TRAITS IN THE CHARACTER OF DAVID.

IT will have been observed that we have not spared king David in our judgment of the evil which he wrought in Israel. We have been careful to mete out to him the full penalty,

so that the scoffer should have no advantage over the Christian in condemning the iniquity of the king. We ourselves have trembled under the thunders of the judgment which has been pronounced upon him. Sometimes as the hot sentences fell we almost cried out, Spare the king! Let pity have some place in judgment! But we did not spare him; for we thought of the dead soldier—the frank-hearted and valiant Uriah. But is it not time to inquire if there were any fine traits in the king's character? Was he all corruption? Is it not legitimate, not to say generous, to arrest the process of judgment for a little while that we may inquire whether there was in David—so base, so guilty—anything that should excite our imagination and draw forth commendatory and righteous words?

Absalom has been killed. Notwithstanding the king's injunctions respecting his rebel son, three darts have been delivered from the hand of Joab, and Absalom is dead. He was a faithless, most unworthy son; and now that three darts are quivering in his dead flesh, will the king rejoice that the rebel is no more? If so, his character has changed since king Saul died. Saul did not use David generously or justly, yet when he was killed we were present at the great cry of lamentation. Has king David changed? When the tidings were brought to him of Absalom's fate he was utterly crushed: he "was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (xviii. 33). If these words had been found alone we should have said, This is a species of parental selfishness, the expression of a natural instinct. But they are all but identical with the words which were uttered respecting king Saul: they were the expression of a great generous heart, they were the poetry of a just and noble spirit. And again:—"The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (xix. 4). He cried in a great wilderness. His lamentation sounded hollow in the dreary void. So long as a man can feel distress in this way, there is hope of him; he is not an utterly dead and lost man. Wherever human feeling exhibits itself we may take hope. A tear shows that the door of

the heart is still open. If we catch from the worst of men one word of penitence, one sigh of contrition, one utterance of deep genuine grief, let us not blot the man's name out of the record: he yet may entertain the Son of God. Woe be unto him who is past feeling, who takes all tidings with equal indifference, who cares not whether the king be dead or the king be alive, how the battle has gone! He is past feeling; he has become a fool in Israel, and over his burial none will weep. Now that the judgment is passed, or that the clouds have ceased to pour down their wrath for one little moment, it is beautiful to see that the man who has been thus condemned, and justly so, still has a heart—a great, responsive, sensitive heart. Let thus much at least be put down to his credit.

The king was swallowed up of grief; he could do nothing more; his state duties were suspended, his imperial relations were all but ignored. The people felt this most deeply:—

"And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now" (xix. 5-7).

Joab was an arrogant and imperious man, full of "the insolence of office"; a murderer, and one who could take mean advantage of another man's humiliation. Yet he was a statesman, long-headed and shrewd,—the very Iscariot of the Old Testament! He was right as to his appraisement of the circumstances in which Israel was placed; and David, who was a longer-headed man, knew it quite as well as Joab: so he "arose, and sat in the gate" (xix. 8). He shook off his sorrow, and became the king again. He said: A king must not give way to private grief too long; the king has imperial duties, royal obligations, and his place is not the chamber of solitude for ever; he must go out now and again, and sit in the gate, and show himself to the people. So there the king sat.

"And they told unto all the people saying, Behold the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent" (xix. 8).

This is the right exercise of influence. We must not allow personal griefs to last so long as to injure public or general responsibility. Sorrow may degenerate into a species of selfishness. We may urge that we are still mourning,—and the mourning in itself is not condemned: it may be right and proper; but life is larger than one hour of its duration; life has its duties; life is a battle-field; life is a continual controversy, and we miss the captain's presence, the eldest soldier's strong hand: we pine and perish because our leader is away. Thus the Bible has lessons for all circumstances and conditions of life: let those who need those lessons lay them wisely to heart.

Now the king was king again. The rebellion of Absalom was over, and the way was quite clear to the throne of Israel. Now it is the king's turn to avenge himself. We have just heard Shimei curse and rave and foam with madness; we have seen that base man throwing stones at the king and dust upon the king's servants;—now the king will be avenged. What does Shimei do now?

"And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David; . . . And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king" (xix. 16, 19, 20).

Precisely what we expected from the man when he cursed so loudly, and threw stones so recklessly at the Lord's anointed.

"But Abishai the son of Zeruiah, answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" (xix. 21).

Abishai would have gone forth, sword in hand, and decapitated the contrite coward, suspecting his contrition, and suspecting it justly. And David would say—Yes; this is our opportunity: the wheel goes round, the whirligig of time keeps moving: now

let the hands of my friends be upon this son of Gera and blot him out from the earth? But David did not speak so: said he,—

"Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him" (xix. 22, 23).

Was he not worth killing? Was he a sincere man? In a little time we shall see. Judgment overtook him, and crushed him, and he lives in history as a rebel and a liar. Let us not presume too much upon God's clemency. We have done evil to our King: we have defiled his house; we have abandoned his altar; we have spent our spite and contempt upon his servants; we have said, Who is the Lord that we should serve him, or the Almighty that we should come unto him? The whole white heaven is empty, and we will do as we please upon the earth. Whilst we are talking so, let us refresh our memory with some historical instances. Shimei had his day: he cursed the king and threw stones at the head that was crowned; but he came and crawled before the same king, and asked for that king's pity. And David spared him. May it not be so with us spiritually? Are there not times when we feel very independent; when we are, indeed, quite defiant from the religious point of view, when we say, The earth is ours and the fulness thereof: we will sow when we please and reap when we like; we will pull down our barns and build greater, and our profits shall be redundant, and the latter end shall be more than the first? And then we forget to pray and sing and do all the sweet duties of worship. But the Lord sitteth in the heavens; he will not willingly slay the children of men. He spares even blasphemers. But "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." There is no escape from the final judgment. Shimei lives a day or two, but presently the fate he has invoked and deserved will swallow him up. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." There are threatenings as well as promises, and the threatenings are not the petulant words of defiance, but the solemn declarations of eternal righteousness. Sad is the lot of the enemy! He shall be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel.

Then there was a supposed enemy as well as a real one :—

"And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace" (xix. 24).

Ziba had told lies to the king about Mephibosheth. Ziba had said : The lame dog tarries in Jerusalem, saying his chance has come now : the house of Saul will return to power ; and Mephibosheth lies there in ambush, ready to seize the golden chance ; I told thee before, at least suggestively, that he, the son of Saul, was of the quality of Saul (xvi. 3). David simply said to the lame man, "Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth ?" (xix. 25). A beautiful inquiry ! The king is calm. His equanimity assists the expression of his justice. He is nobly generous. See him : fair, wrinkled, grave : grief written all over his face ; a man who has seen life in its most troubled aspects, yet chastened, subdued, mellowed : a shepherd-boy turned into a comparatively and prematurely old man. Observe how he looks down upon the lame son of Jonathan, and says, "Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth ?" I expected to have found thee in my train : wherefore didst thou not come ?

"And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me : for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king ; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king ; but my lord the king is as an angel of God : do therefore what is good in thine eyes" (xix. 26, 27).

And the king was generous to Mephibosheth. He seemed to understand the case. He knew the plots of liars, the plans of astute and selfish empirics and adventurers, and he saw in the face of the son of Jonathan some flash of sincerity that reminded him of his fastest friend and of his own oath. These qualities are not to be overlooked in estimating the character of king David. It was right that he should be thundered upon, and that the darts of God's lightning should strike him ; at the same time, it is right that we should depict all the finer features, all the more exquisite lineaments of this manifold character. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." So said the Son of David ! Surely the historical

father, the lineal ancestor, was not short of the quality which expresses itself in these noble exhortations. Let us quicken our eyes to see fine features, noble excellences; as well as quicken our judgment to criticise with exasperating severity.

David was tender-hearted. In his following there was an old man, eighty years old he said he was; "a very great man;" one of the three rich men who ministered to David when he came to Mahanaim (xvii. 27). He was one of those who

"Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness" (xvii. 28, 29).

David forgat and forgave his enemies—will he forget and ignore his friends? Is it an impartial memory that forgets everything alike—the opening day, and the closing and stormy darkness? How did David treat the venerable Barzillai? "And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem" (xix. 33),—thou wast good to me in the day of misery: come and be a king's son, and sit at my table. But old men are not easily moved. It is difficult to transplant old trees. Barzillai said: Well, I am old, I have little time to live; to go up to Jerusalem, what would it be but a disappointment to all of us? I am this day fourscore years old; I can hardly discern between the good and the evil; I am an old outworn man; nay, let me go back again, and not be a burden unto my lord the king; "Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?" Go at my pace, and I will walk with thee a little way; but I want to die at home, and to be buried in the old family place (xix. 34-37).

"And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place" (xix. 39).

We must not forget these incidents in estimating a man's varied life, nor fasten upon particular points as if they were the whole character; let us be large in our view and noble in our judgment; and, whilst we find that "the best of men are only men at the best," be glad to find even in unexpected places glints

at least of heavenly splendour, touches of divine dignity. But Barzillai, though an old man, remembered that there were young men about him, and he said in effect: I cannot go to be a king's child now, at my advanced time of life :—

"But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee" (xix. 37, 38).

Another very fine feature in the character of Barzillai, as well as in the character of David. Chimham was the old man's son. Let us not forget the young. If we cannot take honours and high positions, we may introduce other people who may have some capability for high service, faculty for hard work, and hidden claim to just renown. Here is an old man who cares for the coming generation. Such a man, then, is not old in any sense of exhaustion and uselessness. Would that some people knew when their work was done, and that they would quietly step aside and let younger people have a chance in life! Is it not pitiable to see how some men cling on to the very last, whilst men of capability and fine spirit and good faculty are kept waiting, and are becoming discouraged and disheartened? Every man must answer such appeals for himself: no general judgment can be pronounced; but this can be said: blessed is the old man who knows there are young men behind him, and who is willing to stand aside and let other men have the opportunity which made him what he himself became.

A sudden temptation seized king David. A great wind smote his little boat on the lake and overturned it as it were without notice. The adversary the devil, who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, sprang upon king David, and the king gave way. He who killed the lion and the bear and the uncircumcised Philistine; he who was valiant beyond all soldiers and wise beyond all kings had his "vulnerable heel," and was brought to the dust of humiliation. But his good qualities were many and strong. Some of his critics are not so good as their victim. They should at least restrain judgment, and be made sorrowfully quiet in the presence of

much of his iniquity. Let us hand the case over to the living God.

But character is not a question of points, and particular excellences, or special defects: character is a matter of spirit, purpose, aim, and tone of life. Separate actions are not to be viewed as if they included the whole case: the question is, What would you do if you could? What is your supreme desire and purpose? What is the main current of your motive, impulse, and action? If the inquiry be met with words of self-condemnation, you give me an opportunity of declaring the eternal gospel. We are rejoiced wherein any man condemns himself, because the measure of his condemnation gives the exact degree in which the door of his heart is open to receive messages from heaven. There is only one cure for human iniquity; there is only one way by which human character can be purified and ennobled: "Ye must be born again." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Then those sweet words, namely: "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Then this gracious challenge: "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" Then this final assurance; "According to your faith be it unto you." The transaction is between man and God, between the sinner and the Saviour, between the man who can do nothing for himself, and a Saviour who has died to redeem him. So do not go into despair because of wickedness, and do not go into presumption because of occasional good qualities; but remember that the question is a vital one, that the matter rests entirely with the condition of the heart: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." These are David's prayers, and they well become our sinful lips.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, thou dost turn our mourning into joy, and make our tears blessings. Thou dost abolish death and set the grave on the road to heaven. All this thou dost in Jesus Christ, thy dear Son, our one and only Saviour, infinite in his sufficiency, tender beyond all human love in his inexhaustible compassion. In ourselves we die, we wither away and are no more, but in Christ we have resurrection and immortality and heaven, yea, we have unsearchable riches; because he lives, we shall live also, and in his eternity we shall find the continuance of our being. This is our Christian hope; we received this hope at the cross, at the vacant sepulchre, in the ascension hour when Jesus went up far above all principality and power and dominion to plead for us and prepare for his saints a place. We bless thee for all Christian hope; it chases away the deepest shadows; it fills the inmost recesses of our being with a tender light: it floods the firmament with ineffable glory. We bless thee that no longer do we die—death is abolished in Christ and by him: we now sleep unto rest, we are numbered with the mightiest of the Church of the first-born: we now pass no grim monster, we are taken up into heaven. If thou wilt increase our faith so that we may lay hold of these truths more intelligently and more firmly, the earth shall charm us no more by its fascinations, its temptings shall be spurned as cruel mockeries, and whilst we are yet in the world we shall be in heaven with God.

We rejoice in the Christian sanctuary, in the calm Sabbath, in the open volume of revelation, in the communion of saints, in common prayer and praise, and in the mutual study of thy holy word. We pray that the light may come down from heaven, that there may be no darkness on the inspired page. May this opportunity be to us full of gladness, may it open as a gate upon heaven, may it come to us as liberty, the opening of the prison to them that are bound. May thy disquieted ones have rest, may thy troubled ones dry their tears and see beyond the clouds, may the weariest find rest and the most sinful feel the efficacy of the holy blood of sacrifice, and thus may every soul be blest, liberated, enriched, sanctified, and made content with the satisfaction of peace.

We mourn our sin: it is always before us, it overshadows our brightest gladness, it makes our feast a trouble, it turns our night into a time of judgment. O that we might know the cleansing of the blood of Christ, the liberty of complete pardon, the joy of final release from the burden and the torment of guilt. We are unequal to this task: for this wound we have no balm, for this sorrow we have no healing given by man. But there is balm in Gilead, there is blood on Calvary, there is a Sacrifice for sin—O that our faith might

answer the privileges that are given unto us in Christ, that so we might be made free and pure and glad for ever. Enable us by the ministry of thy Holy Spirit to know the truth, to love it, to hold it fast, to manifest it in all needful speech, in all beautifulness of behaviour, in all nobility of temper, so that by gentleness, pureness, charity and honourableness among men we may evermore preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May thy truth dwell in us, touching every point of our life, making us glad even in the midst of sorrow, giving us outlook and mighty reach over all inferior things in the time of trial and dismay.

We bless thee that we know what life is in Christ. We know that we must have trial, we must be weary, we must feel occasional darkness, but these are light afflictions: they endure but for a moment while we look at eternal things. Help us to fix our wandering vision upon the abiding realities, upon the infinite spaces, yea, upon the throne of God and the cross of Christ,—then shall no enemy be able to trouble the depths of our peace.

Regard us as those who long to see thee and know thee and love thee with fuller love. Why else are we here? The world could please our senses and we could listen with momentary pleasure to the lying flatteries of time. Thou hast enabled us to outlive these, to know their true value, and to encounter them with sacred contempt. We yearn for true satisfaction—we would find our contentment only in God. We humbly beseech thee, therefore, seeing that this is our yearning, to meet us and make us glad. Thy servants have come from the market place, from positions of responsibility, danger, anxiety and temptation: from the study and the closet. Thine handmaidens have come from the house and from the nursery, and from the sick chamber, and from manifold conditions of life. These dear little children, too, are here, hardly knowing why: they have come for explanation—may that explanation give them joy. Regard us then as fathers, mothers, children, men and women who have responsibilities to sustain in life, and according to the necessity of each heart and the trouble of each spirit, according to the depth of the wound which gives us agony, and the height of the joy which makes us triumphant, do thou command thy fatherly blessing to rest upon us all. Thine are no partial showers, they are great rich rains that make the hills soft, and the rivers overflow. O that we might feel the impartiality of thy favour and grace, and all be blest according to our souls' capacity.

We pray that thy word may enrich us, teach us somewhat, humble us, correct our estimates and views of life, give a new tone to our whole purpose and being, and thus be fraught with manifold blessings to us, as those who are living a life of probation and hope. Again we own our sin, again we ask for pardon; now and evermore, till the delivering angel come and set us free from time, will we—must we each for himself—say "God be merciful to me a sinner." Amen.

VICTORY TURNED INTO MOURNING.

"And the victory that day was turned into mourning."—2 Sam. xix. 2.

THE victory spoken of is a victory that was longed for, and yet when it came it was as intolerable as the sting of an adder. How is it that we are always wanting things, and often when we get them they are bitterness itself? We should think a little about this, and try to be wiser to-morrow than we are to-day. But this seems to be impossible. It would seem to be a kind of law of this rude and incoherent life of ours, that we must, in the majority of instances, play the fool.

David wanted to be rid of his enemies—he was in this case challenged to vindicate his own throne. This was no fight of his own forcing—he was obliged to meet the insubordination and the revolt of his own son. All his arrangements were made, and the king, half hoping, half fearing, living that divided life of ours of which we never can get the two parts wholly together, was waiting at home. Messengers came: he wanted to see them—he hated their very shadow: he longed for them—he could have cursed them. He watched their eyes and their lips ere yet they fully came into his presence. He could have bribed them to tell lies, and yet he must hear the truth: he wants to know the fact, and yet he would have given half his kingdom if he could make that fact correspond with his own wishes. Strange life—sad, tragic, comic, wild, multitudinous, unmanageable: and that life is ours, if it be other than a superficial existence, a throb, and a flutter without solemnity and completeness. The messengers came to the king, and they told David that his enemies had been overcome: he might now be at rest—the troublers of his kingdom were, for the time being at least, despoiled, and were able no long to trouble the good king's reign. "And," said he, "the young man . . . ?" "The young man? The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." "And the king was much moved." Is a king a man? Is the humanity deeper than the officialism? Do Pharaoh's daughters weep? Does a lump come into a queen's throat when she hears her children prayed for? "The king was

much moved." There is a time when our crowns are baubles, when our furniture and stablings, and estates trouble us and hurt us and disquiet us and mock us by their very brilliance and value. "And he went up to the chamber over the gate and wept." Sometimes that is all a man wants—just room enough to cry in, for his is a broken heart, the world is a deceitful place, time is a liar, victories are defeats. And as he went, not after he had gotten to the place, but on the road, when he did not mean to do it, and he wanted nobody to hear him,—on the road he broke down and said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Not the traitor, not the revolter—the son still: and it is just so with us and the great Father-King. He might call us rebels, revolters, anarchists, leaders of rebellion, heads of confusion, traitors unfit to live: but that infinite heart of his finds better expression—in tender words and kind speeches; and pathos deeper than our mother's pity.

David, mighty king—you wanted to be rid of your enemies: they are dead: how now? "Yes," said he, "I wanted to be rid of my enemies, but not in that way." There it is again—it is always in some other way that we want our desire granted. "The end is good, that is to say, it is exactly what I wanted: my enemies are cleared out of the field, the clouds have gone from round about my throne, my kingdom is now established in peace and quietness—but there is a great emptiness in the house, a feeling of awful hollowness in the kingdom, for my troubling son, but son still, is killed." You want to get clear of that son of yours? You don't. And you have said how much you would give if he were only out of the way. But all the while you made a great fatherly reservation when you said so, and a great motherly emphasis unexpressed was in your heart when you talked about his being out of the way. You meant somewhere—more comfortable, more useful, more happy. You did not mean out of the way in any tragic sense. O strange man—wild, tumultuous life. We want, and we don't want; we pray, and we don't want the answer, at least, not so—but thus, a crooked answer to a straight request. We want the man to hear our curses on his deeds, and yet we would be the first to put out

both hands to save him from the smiting lightning. How is that? Bethink you whether it is not better to keep some troubles, than to have some joys, and let us say whether it is not better for our souls' health to keep the ills we have, than fly to others that we know not of. We want to be rid of our pains and troubles and difficulties, and the Lord will not remove them; he knows that if they were gone, something worse would come in their place, so he quiets us by saying, "What thou knowest not now, thou shalt know hereafter. This is very humbling to thee and trying, and I know this affliction bites clean through to the bone, yea, and toucheth the very marrow itself, and I know this shadow makes even June's longest day a kind of night in thy soul —but 'tis well for thee: better than thou dost suppose; pray on, hope on, the end will explain the road." If we could accept this word and rest in it, we should be wise, and pious, and true—but the flesh, our vanity, our incomplete nature will not do so, and thus we are afflicting ourselves with rods the Lord never intended us to use upon our poor lives.

We are all trying for victory. See if that be not true. Every man, even the poorest, is aiming at some kind of victory in life. Think if this be not so, father, mother, child, man of business, man of letters, boy challenging schoolmate to a marble encounter —through and through life, every section of it, we are trying in some way to get the promised end. Life is a competitive examination from the moment we can put two words together to the moment when we lay down the old man's staff for the last time.

But we are taught here that there are occasions upon which the victory is not worth winning. Is that not so in most cases? What do men want? One says: Riches. He heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them—is the victory worth the winning? Another says: Well, I want to conquer that human heart, and make it mine—man's heart, woman's heart—saith the young. Is it worth doing? It may be, it may not be. I want that apple on the bough above—not that one, but the one higher. Is it worth fetching a ladder for? Try: you get it, but the worm had it first, and you spurn it with keen disappointment from your hand. It is well, therefore, for

men before they go out to battle, to answer the question—if I win, is it worth doing?—because there are victories that are defeats, there are triumphs that are stings, there are achievements that have nothing in them but graves and horrors and mockeries.

Shall we say, without any desire to be too gloomy, that there is nothing upon earth out of God, out of Christ, that is worth doing, worth having? Once we did not think so, and no book could have so taught us, and no preacher, fervent in exhortation, could have forced it upon us: we should have called him dyspeptic, mistaken: but we know it now. And yet the very things that in themselves are not worth having, may, when used in the spirit of Christ, and enjoyed under the responsibility of personal stewardship to God, become pleasures, satisfactions, joys, means of good, means of usefulness to others. Solomon was right—we did not think so at the time, but we have lived to reverse our judgment—when he said, after having swept the curriculum of the university of time and the university of the devil, "Vanity of vanities—a veering, veering, hollow wind, saith the preacher." David felt on the day to which the text refers that some victories may be bought too dearly. Why, if you have paid too much for the house you live in, you feel as if you had a controversy with the walls, and feel half ashamed of the place. It is even so with some victories: we may be paying too much for them. Here is a man who is determined to achieve his end. He boasts that he never yet did fail to carry out his purpose. It is a fool's boast—that, parenthetically—but he has come to a strait place where progress is difficult: to a turnstile, and there is a severe overlooker, and the overlooker says, "What you pay to go through here is honour." "Nothing less?" "Nothing." "Take it." He is through, he will come back no more—he has gone through into a wilderness, trackless, boundless, into which, if a man get, he can never come out again.

You are determined to carry your point in business, in the school, in the church, in the street—you will realise your point, and you have now reached a very particularly critical spot. Can you get through there? No. Under it? No. Over it? No

Something must be done before you can move. The devil keeps the stile, and you say, "What is it that you demand of passers by?" And the answer is, "Conscience. We take souls here. Silver and gold, none of it: every man passing this counter lays down his soul." "His soul?" say you in reproachful soliloquy. "It is a high price. May I not go through for less?" "Not a whit." Some one behind touches you on the shoulder and says "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" You call him a fanatical preacher, an embodiment of the sentimental conditions of life—you say, "That is very well in theory, and if this had been Sunday and this a church I could have listened to you for decency's sake; but I am on the road to my purpose, to my victory, and I must have it. Here——" and the price is paid. Well, you have carried your point; was it worth carrying? The great difficulty is this, that a man does not know how much he has paid until he has really got hold of his victory, and felt how comparatively valueless it is. Could we have had a short trial trip over the lines of life, it might have been well for some of us, but there are no trial trips, no rehearsals of this great drama —you go in and do what you can. Could I have had some twenty years' preliminary experience before beginning life in earnest, some say, there had been fewer blots upon the page, fewer crookednesses in the line: I should have done better. But there is no such rehearsal permitted in the government of God. You began at the cradle; you pass on to the tomb. Where the tree falls it must lie for ever. It fell there and no help can change it. And thou, poor scribbler, throwing down thy pen, without Christ, can only say, "What is writ, is writ—would it were worthier." Seeing, therefore, that we are well warned there is no rehearsal, no preliminary trial or testing of life, but that it is a solemn transaction, complete in itself, and only to be performed once for all, it becomes us to think which is the right end of things, which is the right key in which to set life, what are the things worth doing and what are the things, how tempting soever, that are not worth accomplishing. It is the purpose of the Church, it is the business of the ministry, it is the object of Christ, it is the mission of the Holy Ghost to teach these things, and surely we need to learn them.

Are there any victories that cannot be turned into mourning? Blessed be God, there are victories that are followed by no compunction, no humiliation—blessings that have no sorrow in them. What is your complaint before God? What is the disease that is poisoning your blood, and burning in your marrow, and consuming your soul—your own peculiar disease? Jealousy? Conquer it by the Spirit of God, pray about it, shut thyself up long months and have it out with heaven. This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting, prayer a month long, fasting to the point of famine. Though thou go into thy religious solitude a young man thirty, and dost come out a month after, an old man seventy, if thou canst say, "God has enabled me to strangle the serpent, to tear its fang out of its throat and thrust it into eternal flames;" thou shalt have no mourning—it will be a victory for ever, unimpaired, complete, full of joyous self-content.

What is thy disease, thou who dost say that jealousy is no element in thy constitution—what is thy plague? Self-indulgence, self-gratification, self-delight—self, self, self, morning, noon, and night—none beside—only myself: I alone, I am the world, think of me, comfort me, let me have my way, satisfy my want—is the key of thy life so struck? Conquer thyself. "If any man would be my disciple," saith Christ, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, not periodically, not with occasional heroism, but with steady, constant self-crucifixion, and let him follow me." You have gone out to the battle; we will wait for you; you come back older, yet younger; bruised, yet healed with immortality, shaken, yet firm as a rock. You say, "Let others be thought of." If you say it not, so much the better, if you but do it. Men will take notice of you, who have known you aforetime, that there is a deeper gentleness in your spirit than they ever suspected before, a larger charity, a nobler feeling, a more lovely willingness to give way and concede, and they will own possibly that even you may have a new heart. Hast thou won that battle? There is no other battle to be won; fight yourself—beat yourself—set the standard of a new being upon the fortressess and citadels of your own obstinacy, and then you may beat your sword into a plough-share, and make a pruning-hook of your spear, for in your case there is no more war to be done.

How is all this to be accomplished? some poor earnest soul may ask. The answer is as complete as the question is earnest and emphatic. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." They are poor victories that are wrought by the hands: other hands may overcome these, and turn them into defeats. Moral victories, spiritual triumphs, accomplishments of the soul through the patience and might of Christ—these abide. Time writes no wrinkles on their brow—they are fair with immortal youth. Lord, increase our faith. It is by faith we overcome the present, and the present truly is the great enemy and besieger of our souls, simply because it is the present: it is so near, so large, so clamorous, so importunate: all its supposed blessings are here on the spot, and are offered instantaneously—and not having far and keen outlook over things boundless, we may be tempted to snatch the immediate prize. Then shall our eyes be opened, and we shall flee away from the light because we are ashamed.

We sometimes celebrate a mourning that shall be turned into victory, even the mourning of Christ, the crucified Man, who said, "My soul is troubled, even unto death. Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" These are the words of mourning. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth—Go ye therefore, and teach all nations." These are the words of victory. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."

Unless we have known the bitterness of this mourning we never can know the joy of true victory. If we examine the keenest, the most solid joys of life, we shall find that they go back into shadow, melancholy, gloom, and Gethsemane. Other joys are external, flippant, momentary: "snowflakes on the river—a moment seen and gone for ever." Have no joy that is not shaded with a mysterious melancholy: highest joys touch the profoundest sensitiveness; it is hardly to be distinguished as to where one ends and the other begins. There is a mourning that hath no joy, there is a mourning that seems to be joy at its very climax, its highest point an acme point.

Are you crucified with Christ? You shall rise with him. Have you known the fellowship of his sufferings? You shall know the power of his resurrection. If we suffer we shall also reign with him. You want the enjoyment without the suffering, you cannot have it; this is God's law, it is out of agony we pluck our keenest joys. If you have godly sorrow which worketh repentance, it will not need to be repented of, it will end in joy unspeakable and full of glory. Are you in deep distress of soul? I will not sympathise with you in the sense of wishing that distress less: I wish that distress to get deeper, more complete, to include your life of life, every drop of your rebellious blood, and then I have a gospel for you; I shall be as an angel breaking through the midnight gloom, singing to you on the plains of your distress, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, goodwill toward men. I bring you good tidings of great joy, a Christ-day, that shall turn your mourning into joy. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, for he hath sent me to proclaim liberty to the captive, the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, to appoint a feast for those afflicted with famine, and to give the oil of gladness for the ashes of mourning." This is what the gospel has to do in the world: it cannot do more, for this is pardon, this is heaven.

SELECTED NOTE.

David's fondness for Absalom was unextinguished by all that had passed; and as he sat, awaiting tidings of the battle, at the gate of Mahanaim, he was probably more anxious to learn that his son lived, than that the battle was gained; and no sooner did he hear that Absalom was dead, than he retired to the chamber above the gate, to give vent to his paternal anguish. The victors as they returned, slunk into the town like criminals, when they heard the bitter wailings of the king:—"O my son, Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" The consequences of this weakness—not in his feeling, but in the inability to control it—might have been most dangerous, had not Joab gone up to him, and after sharply rebuking him for thus discouraging those who had risked their lives in his cause, induced him to go down and cheer the returning warriors by his presence (2 Sam. xiii.–xix. 8).

GENERAL NOTES.

2 Samuel xx.

FROM the conclusion of the nineteenth chapter we learn that the tribe of Judah, being deeply moved by the course which David had pursued, and full of affection towards the king, had united generally in completing his restoration. The other tribes who had proposed to return to their allegiance probably had not had time to take part in the present action, or may indeed have been almost wholly ignorant of it, which gave Shimei, with his one thousand Benjamites and some others, an advantage, because they were living near. Adding to their number the tribes east of the Jordan, the probability is that about half the people of Israel were able to come together. When David halted at Gilgal the representatives of tbe tribes who had not had an opportunity of joining in the loyal movement came together, animated by intense wrath at the apparent neglect which had been shown towards them. Out of this internecine controversy there arose an opportunity for one or two turbulent spirits to attempt to renew the rebellion of Absalom. This brings us to the events recorded in the twentieth chapter. We are first introduced to Sheba, the son of Bichri, or, as it is read by recent commentators, the Bichrite,—that is, a member of the family of Becher, the second son of Benjamin. This man was, therefore, by so much related to the clan of Saul. It is difficult to get the old taint out of the blood. Sheba is a minimised Saul, full of hostility to David and all his interests. Even bad men have their opportunity in life. We have seen again and again how easy it is to do mischief. Sheba, a man who probably had no power to construct a positive fame by deeds of beneficence and the origination of statesmanlike policies, had it in his power to set fire to dangerous substances and bring into peril a movement which promised to consummate itself in the happiest results to Israel. The historical instance ought to be a continual

lesson. The meanest man may pull down a wall, or set fire to a palace, or whisper a slander concerning the character of a king. The remarkable thing is that whilst society is well aware of all this possibility, it is willing to lend an ear to every wicked speaker who arises, insisting upon the old and detestable sophism that although the report may not be wholly and literally true, there yet must be some foundation for it. Wicked men seem to know how their statements will be taken by society, and consequently they may be said to obtain their daily livelihood by false pretences. The proverb is—"Throw mud enough, and some of it will be sure to stick," and again the proverbial expression is—"where there is smoke there is fire;" doctrines of this kind can only be deprived of popularity and influence by wise and righteous men persistently refusing to accept them and act upon them. Who has it not in his power to raise a cry of fire at midnight in the centre of a sleeping town? The evil messenger has but to cry out loudly enough, and then to conceal himself in the darkness, and he will be almost sure to gratify his malignity by the development of a panic. What help there is for this species of evil action can only be found in the strength and courage of the better quality of men. Such men must give plotters, schemers, adventurers, and slanderers to feel that their word is utterly discredited and that the more they asseverate the less will they be believed.

Sheba is described in the text as "a man of Belial," in other words, a child of the devil. A man's spiritual parentage is known by the deeds in which he delights. We have in the first verse a kind of double genealogy of Sheba; he is called "the son of Bichri, a Benjamite," and he is also described as "a man of Belial." It would seem as if in some cases men had a lineal physical descent, and had also a direct spiritual ancestry. Account for it as we may, there are practical differences in spirit and character which would seem almost to suggest two different grades or qualities of human nature. Whilst it is profoundly and sadly true that all men are apostates, and that there is none righteous, no, not one, it is also undeniable that there are chiefs in the army of evil, princes of sin, royal and dominating personages in the whole kingdom of wickedness. They are

ingenious in the device of evil; their imagination is afire with the very spirit of perdition; they can invent new departures, striking policies, undreamed-of cruelties, unimaginable wanderings from the path of rectitude. It is most certain that many men simply "follow a multitude to do evil;" they have little or no invention of their own; they would never originate rebellions or lead insurrections, or devise plots involving great disasters; they are but followers, imitators, echoes not voices, persons who go by the bulk and not by detail, being only of consequence in proportion to their multitudinousness, having no independent spirit of their own when taken one by one. A horrible fame indeed to be known as a very prince of evil; this man Sheba, son of Bichri, son of Belial, suddenly springs up into a notoriety which is quickly turned into abiding and unpardonable infamy. Even Sheba, as we have seen, had it in his power to do evil, for all Israel followed him: whilst "the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem" (v. 2). Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth; a spark may set a forest ablaze.

David, being now impatient of the insolence of Joab, and willing to avail himself of an opportunity of superseding that able but arrogant captain, gave an appointment to Amasa, saying, "Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present" (v. 4). The king feared more from Sheba the son of Bichri than he did from Absalom. As Amasa went forth he encountered an unexpected foe in the person of Joab. It is explained in the text how Joab by a peculiar arrangement of his dress—a girdle bound round his military coat—had contrived to conceal a dagger which would fall out as he advanced. The dagger falling out thus gave Joab an opportunity of naturally picking it up, as he wished to use it, without exciting the suspicion of Amasa. Thus even in so small a trick the depravity of Joab is made manifest. Taking Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him, Joab smote him in the fifth rib, with but one blow, but that a fatal stroke. Joab would thus tolerate no rivals by whomsoever they might have been appointed. This desperateness of spirit was really part of the greatness of the man,—that is to say, apart from such desperateness he never could have brought to bear all his various faculties of statesman

and soldier. Morality has often commented upon the circumstance that great talents should be turned to base uses. So it is the world over: the completer the education as a merely intellectual exercise, the more disastrous is the power to do evil, unless the education has been supported and chastened by adequate moral training. It is mere idolatry to admire greatness alone: when that greatness is held in check by enlightened consciousness, then its recognition really involves an act of worship to him who is the Spirit of Righteousness and the teacher of the world. It is but just, however, to say that we are not to judge Joab by the morality of a much later age. Every man is to be judged within the day which is distinctively his own, and is not to have To-morrow's morality set up as the standard of all his actions. Nor does this suggestion destroy what may be called the eternal distinction between right and wrong. Whilst that distinction is unquestionably eternal and unchangeable, its interpretation is not always given with equal vividness, nor does it embody itself at all times in equal positiveness and clearness of detail. Morality itself is part of an infinite but most beneficent evolution. Even a good cause may have bad supporters. The cause in which Joab was now engaged was unquestionably a good one, being nothing less than the restoration of David to his kingly position in Israel, and by so much the fulfilment of a divine covenant. Joab had a good cause, but he brought to its support a very questionable character. Is not this same instance repeating itself along the whole line of history? Is not the Church indebted to many a man whose heart is in the world and whose ambition is his only god? Are there not some men eloquent of tongue whose hearts are silent as to true worship? Is not good money often given by polluted hands? "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." Who can expect perfection in imperfect men? Whilst this is impossible in the fullest sense of the term, we can at least be ruled by a supreme desire to be morally worthy of the great cause in whose consummation we take a public part.

Joab is now in full pursuit of Sheba. In the course of his progress he came into a place called Abel, at the extreme north of the land. The inhabitants of Beth-maachah and all the Berites

were gathered together and went after Sheba. When they came to Abel, they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench; and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down (v. 15). Here a very curious incident occurred. The wise woman of the city called unto Joab saying,

"Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear. Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter. I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord?" (vv. 17–19).

It has been supposed that the true interpretation of asking counsel at Abel is that Abel had become famous for its wisdom. In one of the Targums we read: "Remember now that which is written in the book of the law, to ask a city concerning peace at the first. Hast thou done so to ask of Abel if they will make peace?" No certain interpretation can be given of the words; but we are at liberty to remember that even superstition has sometimes played a useful part in history. Men have attached importance to times, places, emotions, and by so much have been checked in their impulses and subdued in their fiery ambitions. In conference with this wise woman, Joab reveals an aspect of his character which is deserving of note. He protests that he has no desire to ruin the city, if his object can be gained without the shedding of blood. He was not needlessly cruel, or a man, according to his own showing, who would perpetrate cruelty merely for the sake of enjoying the anguish which he was creating. Bold, resolute, desperate, revengeful, nothing would stand in his way that endangered the completion of his purpose: but if the purpose could be completed without bloodshed and devastation he was more than willing that such ruin and pain should be spared. Joab told the wise woman what he wanted, saying,

"A man of mount Ephraim [the range of hills so called because much of it lay in the tribe of Ephraim], Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall. Then the woman went unto all the

people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab" (vv. 21, 22).

There is a protection that is honourable; and there is an asylum which ought not to be guaranteed at the cost of the interests of the whole people. It is the same with secrets which may have been entrusted to our keeping. There is a confidence which ought never to be violated, being sacred as life and solemn as an oath taken at the altar: but when the keeping of a secret will bring ruin upon innocent men, or when it is a secret which can only be held in defiance of the law and order of society, it ought to be given up, whatever consequence may fall upon the individual man. Even a priest has no right to hold secrets respecting murder, or secrets which prevent the due course of a just and impartial law. Sheba delivered himself into the custody of Abel, as many a secret has been delivered into the custody of pious men. It should be known everywhere that a higher law than any social ordinance or invented statute demands that certain sins should never be held in confidence but should be published whenever the interests of society require their publication. It is one thing to encourage a penitent, and another to conceal a murderer. Upon all these distinctions there can be but one true teacher, and that is an enlightened conscience. Keep the moral nature in a state of high sensitiveness, and it may be safely left to deal with any casuistries and problems of the passing day.

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2 Samuel xxi.

THE points in this chapter are few but significant. There was a famine in the days of David three years, year by year. A famine in Palestine was always a consequence of deficient winter rains, such a deficiency being by no means uncommon: but in this case the famine endured three successive years, and thus became alarming, and impelled men to ask religious questions and make religious arrangements. "David inquired of the Lord,"—in other words, he sought the face of the Lord. In the original the phrase is a different one from that used so frequently in Judges and elsewhere. Is not the action of

David imitated, to some extent at least, by the men of all time? When the east wind blows three days, or three weeks, men do but remark upon it complainingly, and it passes from criticism; but when it continues three months, and three more, and the earth is made white with dust, and every tree stands in blackness and barrenness, and every bird is silent, and the whole landscape is one scene of blank desolation,—then men begin to inquire concerning causes, and even the most flippant and obdurate may be easily moved to seek the face of the Lord. Thus selfishness assumes a religious aspect, and religion is degraded by being crowned with selfishness; thus men make confusion in moral distinctions, and imagine themselves to be pious when they are only self-seeking, and suppose themselves constrained by persuasion when they are simply driven by fear. A very remarkable answer was returned to king David: "The Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloodguilty house, because he slew the Gibeonites." The Gibeonites had never become incorporated with the Israelites by the adoption of the peculiar ordinance of circumcision, but remained a people separate and distinct. The Gibeonites are said to have been a remnant of the Amorites or mountaineers—a frequent name given to the old people of Palestine. We cannot say why the punishment of Saul's violated oath should have been so long delayed. It has been attempted to show a distinction between Saul the son of Kish, and Saul the king of Israel, and so to make Saul's sin into a representative national sin, so that all the people of Israel might suffer for what was done officially in their name. Whilst we are at a loss to account precisely for the delay of this particular penalty, our wonder is at least mitigated by the fact that we see the same law of postponement continued in our own day. We imagine that the sword should fall instantly upon the offender—yea, even whilst the offence is in his hand; but God's way is not our way in this matter: he visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. He thus treats humanity as one. He does not speak about guilty fathers and innocent children; he knows nothing about unborn generations as being separate and independent from all human history; he recognises only the solidarity and unity of the human race, and he brings penalty to bear at times and in

places and in ways which are of his own selection and appointment. Reflections arising out of this fact are abundant, and ought to be regarded as deeply solemn. To-day we may be laying up punishment for men who are to come in our stead many years hence. No man liveth unto himself.

David, having learned the divine reason for the continued famine, now turned in a human direction, as he was bound to do, saying unto the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord?" (v. 3). The word is the term which is used throughout the law in connection with the propitiatory sacrifices. The word literally means to *cover up*. David inquires what he can do to cover up the sin of Saul, so as to remove it from the sight of the men against whom it had been committed—namely, the Gibeonites, who had suffered so much from it, and from God himself against whose law Saul had chiefly offended. The Gibeonites were in a high mood of excitement. They would take no silver or gold of Saul. Money compensations for sins of blood were quite customary amongst ancient nations, but from Numbers xxxv. 31 it would appear that such compensations were distinctly forbidden by the Mosaic law. Nor would the Gibeonites have any man killed in Israel; that is to say, they would not confound the whole of Israel with the house of Saul: they would have the punishment confined solely to the king's personal descendants. Their demand was undoubtedly marked by great severity. They said,

> "The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose" (vv. 5, 6).

Saul himself being dead, his male descendants were considered as standing in his place, and were looked at in the solemn light of actually personating him and having responsibility for his evil deeds. The number seven was full of suggestion, and was also associated with sacred memories, but specially it was regarded as indicating completeness of satisfaction. The execution of the sons of Saul was to be done "unto the Lord,"—that is to say, it

was to be done publicly. In proportion to the outrageousness of the sin was to be the conspicuousness of its punishment. Notice that the execution was to take place in Gibeah, the home of Saul. Is there not a spirit of righteousness in the very act of public punishment? The Gibeonites did not wish to glut their revenge upon the sons of Saul for merely selfish reasons; they regarded the whole affair as involving the theocracy, and not until the execution had been completed could the stains be removed which had been thrown upon the most sacred history of the race. Men's ideas of compensation undergo great changes. It is no surprise that at first the idea of compensation should be considerably rough and formless. Jesus Christ, remarking upon it, set it aside in the letter, and displaced it by a nobler spirit:—"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you" . . . and then came the gospel so difficult to be apprehended by the natural reason, but yielding itself as an infinite treasure to the claim of faith and love. David took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah. He could not lawfully refuse the demand of the Gibeonites, having before him the fact that the law absolutely required that blood-guiltiness should be expiated by the blood of the offender. It is noteworthy as showing the spirit and nobleness of David that he spared for Jonathan's sake the only descendants of Saul in the direct line who could have advanced any claim to the throne, and took the two sons of a concubine, and the five sons of Saul's eldest daughter Michal, who had been promised in marriage to David himself. In incidental traits of this kind we see how completely king David delivers himself from the suspicions of evil minds. His aim was to walk steadfastly in the way of the law, whatever consequences might accrue from his constancy and fidelity. We have in the conduct of Rizpah a beautiful instance of motherliness:—she

"Took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night" (v. 10).

The beginning of harvest points to the time as being immediately after the Passover (Leviticus xxiii. 10, 11), and consequently about the middle of April. The rains of autumn began in

October, so that Rizpah's tender care must have extended over about six months. The spreading of the sackcloth was intended to form a rough shelter during the long winter. She waited until water dropped upon them out of heaven,—that is, until the water-famine was at an end ; and thus the divine forgiveness was assured. A most vivid and ghastly picture this : see the seven bodies fastened to a stake, either by impaling or by crucifixion, and watch them standing there day by day and week by week, until the clouds gathered and the returning rain attested that God had been satisfied because justice had been done in the earth. The Lord from heaven is watching all our oblations and sacrifices and actions, and when we have done that which his law of justice requires he will not forget to send the rain and the sunshine, and to bless the earth with an abundant harvest. What Rizpah had done was not likely to be concealed from king David. He made a beautiful reply to the motherly care of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah. To show that he had no enmity against the house of Saul, he

"Took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa : and he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son ; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father : and they performed all that the king commanded " (vv. 12-14).

Then we come upon a beautiful expression—" And after that God was intreated for the land." There is a solemn lesson here for all time. We must do justice before we can make acceptable prayer, we cannot turn dishonoured graves into altars which God will recognise. " If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee : leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." " Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings."

These are the conditions upon which God will be intreated ; and as we peruse them we cannot but be struck by their moral

dignity and appropriateness, and feel that we are in the hands of a just as well as a merciful God.

There is a line of true melancholy in the remainder of the chapter. The Philistines had yet war again with Israel, but now when David went down and fought against the Philistines we read that "David waxed faint" (v. 15). A splendid life is now showing signs of decay. David in his old age was fighting with giants, but he was no longer the ruddy youth who smote Goliath in the forehead. The giants of the Philistines were hard upon David. Ish-bibenob thought to have slain the king with a new sword, "but Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him." Now other men had to do for David what once David did for other men. Thus positions are changed: Thus one generation passeth away and another generation cometh. A beautiful speech was made to David by his loyal followers: the heart gives way under the touch of pathos which is so discernible in the seventeenth verse:—"Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel." There is a time when a man must cease from war. There is also a time when his character, his peaceful counsels, his benignant smile, may be of more value than the uplifting of his enfeebled arm. None can say that David shunned the field in the spirit of a coward; he was full of valour, and always willing to answer the challenges of Philistine boasters and idolatrous assailants of every name; but he had now had enough of it: old age was telling upon him, and his men magnanimously proposed that he should fight no more but should remain at home and shine as a lamp in the country he had so long adorned. Patriots should take care that their leaders are not too long in the field of danger; and these leaders themselves should know that there is an appointed time for withdrawing from the battle and sitting in noble and well-earned seclusion, guiding by counsel when they can no longer lead by example.

The chapter closes with the history of three victories over giants. There was a battle with the Philistines of Gob; then a second battle; then a third battle in Gath, "where was a man of

great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number. . . . When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimeah the brother of David slew him" (vv., 20, 21). Every day we fight with giants in the spiritual region: they are called principalities, and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world,—invisible but mighty, nameless but strong because of fury. We can only overcome by the grace and power of the God of David. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that having withstood in the evil day, you may stand firm and strong evermore. There is a provided panoply, every part of which has been prepared and appointed by the Captain of heaven. In vain that we take swords of our own manufacture, and adopt plans of our own feeble and perverse ingenuity: stand in the old paths; demand to know the old ways; resolutely refuse to adopt any answer to satanic assault that is not included in the replies of Jesus Christ himself to the great foe; and constantly pursuing this course, the course can have but one end—victory in the name of the Lord, and heaven for evermore.

SELECTED NOTE.

Who was Goliath? (1 Sam. xvii. 23; 2 Sam. xxi. 19.) It is singular to find narrated two distinct stories of the killing of a giant, whose name is given as Goliath, and it has given rise to various explanatory conjectures. Some think the real story is that of Elhanan, which has been wrongly attached to David; but this is a conjecture, indeed, revealing only the wilfulness of him who makes it. Others call the second Goliath *the brother of Goliath*, but with no authoritative ground. It is not in the least likely that the author of the Books of Samuel confused either the names or the incidents, and there should be no difficulty in supposing a second and later giant bearing the same name as the former one. Goliath might very probably be a family name. Jerome thinks that Elhanan is another name for David, and so the second narrative only repeats in brief the first story of David's victory.

2 Samuel xxii., xxiii.

POETRY AT LIFE'S END.

THE twenty-second chapter, although marked by quite a number of slight changes, is identical with Psalm xviii. The fifty-first verse shows that this song must have been composed after the visit of Nathan, at which David received the promise of the perpetuity of his kingdom. As this psalm will be treated in its proper place in the psalter we propose to pass over it here, and proceed at once to the twenty-third chapter. In doing so it must be carefully noted that no attention is to be paid to the chronology of David's life as indicated by the sequence of the chapters in the second Book of Samuel. The best collation of sequences which we have been able to find runs somewhat as follows :—

Absalom's vengeance and flight . .	2 Sam. xiii. 22–38.
The three years of famine . . .	2 Sam. xxi. 1–14.
The census and the pestilence . . .	2 Sam. xxiv.
Absalom's preparations	2 Sam. xv. 1–6.
The Insurrection	2 Sam. xv. 7–12.

Then would follow David leaving Jerusalem ; the sending back of Hushai ; the falsehood of Ziba ; the insulting action of Shimei ; Absalom in Jerusalem ; Ahithophel's suicide ; the crossing of the Jordan by David ; Absalom's defeat and death ; David's grief for Absalom ; David brought back to Jerusalem ; Sheba's rebellion ; the death of Amasa, and the quelling of the revolt.

The twenty-third chapter opens with "the last words of David," wherein his poetic inspiration flashes out, and he proves that his last words are for profound thought and ripened wisdom equal to the fire and passion of his first sublime utterances. The words may be set out in a striking appeal to the eye thus :—

"Thus saith David the son of Jesse,
Thus saith the man that was raised on high,
The anointed of the God of Jacob,
And sweet in the songs of Israel.
The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me,
And his word was on my tongue.
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spoke to me—
A ruler over men—a just one—
Ruling in the fear of God—
It is like the light of the morn, when the sun riseth without clouds.
From clear shining—from rain—grass springs from the earth.
For is not my house thus with God?
For he hath made for me an everlasting covenant,
Ordered in all points, and well kept:
For he is all my salvation, and all my desire.
And will he not make it to flourish?
But the men of Belial are like thorns all of them thrust aside:
For they cannot be taken with the hand.
And if a man will touch them
He is supplied with iron, and the wood, and the spear,
And in the fire are they consumed."

It has well been observed that the blessedness of just government and the inevitable and unchangeable misery of weakness have probably never been more vividly represented in language. Underneath all the poetry lies complete faith in the assurance of Nathan that David's house was established with God for ever. This assurance constituted to him a kind of Messiah in promise; it was indeed the form in which he saw the great deliverer and King of Israel, and so he lived by faith in the Coming One, who was the restorer of the breach. In the authorised version David is called "the sweet psalmist of Israel,"—literally, *he that is pleasant in Israel's psalms*. David does not hesitate to claim personal inspiration in the composition of his loftiest songs. In the second verse he says, "The spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." In the fourth verse we meet with the expression. "A morning without clouds,"—a description of the blessings of an ideally perfect government. David well knew that the ruler of God's people must be just, and that the highest blessings would flow from a government originated and sustained by God and breathing the spirit of his holiness and justice. The following has been submitted as a clear translation

of the whole imagery: "And as the light of the morning, when the sun ariseth, a morning without clouds; as by means of sunlight and by means of rain the tender grass grows from the earth:—is not my house so with God?" The fifth verse is admittedly difficult of translation. Not a few modern commentators take the clauses interrogatively: "Is not my house thus with God? For he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all, and sure: for all my salvation, and all my desire, shall he not cause it to spring forth?" The covenant is represented as being "ordered in all," the idea being that it is formed on the pattern of a carefully-detailed legal document providing for any contingencies, and so explicitly worded as to prevent any misconstruction. "The sons of Belial" referred to in the sixth verse, is not in the common form, but may be represented in an abstract form as equivalent to *worthlessness*. David's meaning is that when divine righteousness is established, not only will it take to itself all that is of kindred nature, but it will reject and utterly cast out all that is evil. David teaches that although wicked people injure and debase all with which and with whom they come in contact, yet God will provide means for their utter extinction. A beautiful picture of the equipment of a destroyer of evil is given in the seventh verse:—"But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear." The meaning is that the thorns are to be handled with an iron hook at the end of a spear-staff. Men are not to venture to take hold of some things with their own hands: they are to use the implements which have been provided by a gracious providence.

Some of the remaining points of interest in the twenty-third chapter are such as these,—namely, that some of David's men were famous in the highest degree for devotion to his person and his cause. The names of the mighty men whom David had were:—Adino the Eznite; Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite; and after him Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. It has been noted that no mention is made of Joab amongst the mighties who surrounded David, some accounting for the absence of the name by the supreme wickedness of that great captain, and others more graciously suggesting that as Joab was commander-in-chief he stood in a rank by himself. Can a finer picture of devotion be

found than is supplied by these three men? One of them is said to have smitten the Philistines "until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword" (xxiii. 10). There are well-authenticated instances of cramp following excessive exertion, so much so that the soldier's hand could only be released from the sword by external force. When the people are described, in the tenth verse, as returning after David, it should be noted that the grammar does not imply that they had at any time deserted him but only that they turned wherever David himself went to gather up the spoil of the men whom he slew, as gleaners always return after the reapers. In his distress David, being confined in a hold, "longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!" (xxiii. 15). There are times when memory goes back to the earliest scenes of life, when only old faiths, old habits, old pastors, old friends, can really minister to the hunger and thirst of the life. The old man is said to live more in his early years than in the times which are passing around him. What is true in general life is significantly and profoundly true in religious experiences: we become dissatisfied with the new, the modern, the last invention, and go back to old times, that we may rest in the house of our youth, and pray at the altar which we built at the first. Any good water would have quenched the thirst of David, but in the moment of his agony he longed for water from the well of Beth-lehem. Even a little touch of superstition, when found in connection with a really grave and solid character, does not diminish the pathos and moral sublimity of a scene like this. Any Bible may do for us in which to read our lesson, but there may be times in life when the Bible used by a mother, a teacher, a pastor,—a Bible with whose very appearance we are familiar, may seem to bring with it helps which do not attach to the ordinary publications of the word. It may be a sign of strength, and even robustness of mind, to assume independence of all such associations and accessories, but I could not advise the cultivation of such apparent independence, for in its essence it is but flippancy and vainglory. It is comforting, too, to think that a time will come when advantages which are now but little thought of will be seen in all the fulness of their worth, and be inquired for with anxious love. Herein let all good men take heart; at

present they may be despised and rejected, but the time will come when they will be remembered, when their names will be repeated with affection, and when their instruction will be sought after with the eagerness of hunger.

Keeping strictly to the local incident, we cannot but see how worthily the three mighty men deserved their fame. They were not merely ornamental personages in the army or in the court. Looking at them in what in our own day we should call their honours, their badges, their medals, or their other decorations, one might wonder how they came to be so signalised. Our wonder is more than satisfied by the deeds which they are reported to have accomplished. If we could for a moment doubt as to the justice of their fame, it would be removed when we read such words as these,—

"And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David" (xxiii. 16).

Now we know that they were worthy of their fame. They were men of daring, men of the highest valour, men whose spirit was subdued and ennobled by supreme loyalty and consecration. May we not apply the same test to our own standing and quality as professors of the Christian name? David's Lord is continually expressing desires: what are we doing to prove that we are willing to bring them to a happy consummation? He desires that his word may be spread abroad to the ends of the earth: who rushes through the hosts of darkness and bears the sacred message to those who are afar off? He desires that his Church should be fairest among all the objects seen of men: who is valiant enough to defy the enemy, to drive away the devastator, and to protect the garden of the Lord from incursion and profanation? Christ desires that the poor should be fed, the ignorant taught, the oppressed delivered, the heart-broken comforted: who has strength enough of mind, and pureness enough of consecration, to abandon all the charms of earthly vanity and glory, and give himself wholly to the cause of humanity as represented in the Son of man? There is a fame not worth having—a fame of mere words, a noise of popularity, a fickle wind that follows men only so long as they are content to be driven by it. Let our

fame be established upon our capacity, service, and beneficence, and it will be an imperishable renown.

The character of David is beautifully brought out by the answer which he made to the enthusiasm of his three mighty servants:—

> "Nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it" (xxiii. 16, 17).

An action like this shows how worthy he was to be king of Israel, notwithstanding the blots and drawbacks which we have not been slow to mark upon the disc of his radiant character. This action on the part of David, too, explains the enthusiasm of the men who thus unselfishly served him. Not for a mere pedant would such services be rendered; when we examine the kind of service that is contributed to the cause of Christ, we may begin to see somewhat of the worth of Christ himself in the very quality of the duty that is undertaken for him. "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die."—That is the explanation of the enthusiasm which David awakened: he was not indeed a righteous man, his character was blackened and disgraced by many a deed of foulness, yet in his soul there was tenderness, humanity, graciousness, chivalry, preparedness to serve his friends at whatever personal cost. So when Christians render great services to their Lord, they are not slow to explain their enthusiasm by saying, "the love of Christ constraineth us." Mere reverence could never do these works which Christians do; only love which Jesus Christ himself could inspire and sustain could follow to the cross, and triumph over all its shame.

Now we come to men who were famous for secondary service. For example, there was Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, who led another band and was chief among three; so strong a man was he that he lifted up his spear against three hundred and slew them. Being the most honourable of the triad to which he belonged he was appointed captain: "howbeit he attained not unto the first three." Then there was "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had

done many acts, he slew two lion-like men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow: and he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear" (xxiii. 20, 21). But even Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, who was "more honourable than the thirty" "attained not to the first three." Then there was Asahel the brother of Joab; following him, Elhanan the son of Dodo of Beth-lehem; Shammah the Hararite, probably the same with Shamhuth the Izrahite, captain of the fifth division of the army (1 Chron. xxvii. 8); then Helez, and Ira; and a glittering list of other noble and mighty men. But still the "first three" stood alone in their primacy, rejoicing in honours which other men might not share. What, then, are men to be discontented because they cannot attain the rank of the "first three"? Here comes the great Christian lesson, that men are to stand in whatever circumstances God has appointed for them, to use their powers according to the opportunities which providence has created. We fritter away our strength, and disqualify ourselves for the work even which we might do, if we envy others and repine because of their exaltation. The true view is that which enables us to regard the first three as part of ourselves. The hand must not say to the foot, I have no need of thee; the eye cannot dispense with the ear, nor can the ear dispense with the eye. We are many members, but one body: some honourable, some less honourable; some comely, others unlovely; but the body is one, and is crowned by Christ as the head. Why should mathematicians begrudge poets their honours? Why should they who can only walk refuse to use their feet because they see others who can fly in the open firmament? God hath set everything in order as it hath pleased him; and we can only grow in faculty as we restrain all envy and uncharitableness, and devote ourselves to such tasks as we are able to accomplish. Even in the economy established by our Lord himself, we find the first three, Peter, James, and John; and after them we find men more or less secondary and obscure. But Jesus Christ has contempt for none of his followers. He ever puts in a word for the "least of these my brethren." He will not even have a "little one" destroyed.

He teaches us that every child has its angel in heaven, steadfastly looking on the face of the Father. He will have the fragments gathered up that nothing be lost. He is the Shepherd who cannot rest while one of his sheep is straying in the wilderness. This being the case, we may be assured that when he sets three men high above all others in his apostolate he has his reason for doing so, and that his reason is consistent with his benevolence towards all the members of his kingdom. What if all were famous? What if all soldiers were generals? What if all generals were commanders-in-chief? In one of his most vivid parables Jesus Christ represents the king as giving to his servants according to their several ability: to one five talents, to another two talents, and to a third one talent. To have one talent is to have fame enough for any creature. The very least of us will find that in the cultivation of his one talent he has work enough to task all his efforts and to absorb all his time. Let us not envy one another, or boast ourselves over other men: for if we have much, much will be required of us: according to our resources will be our responsibilities. There is one comfort which every man may take who is serving Christ: looking abroad, he may see great worldly prosperity, great political fame, great pecuniary wealth, great social éclat, all of them dissociated from Christian principle and sacrifice; his honour consists in the reflection that he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest who are not within the circle of its glory.

SELECTED NOTE.

The word "jeopardy" (2 Sam. xxiii. 17; 1 Chron. xi. 19). In these two passages the Hebrew is simply "that went with their lives." Not very unlike is the expression in 1 Sam. xix. 5, "For he did put his life in his hand and slew the Philistine." So chap. xxviii. 21; Jud. ix. 17, M.R., "Cast his life far"—*i.e.*, adventured it. Psalm cxix. 109, "My soul [*i.e.*, *life*] is continually in my hand: yet do I not forget thy law." What this means is explained in the next, and parallel, sentence, "The wicked *have laid a snare for me:* yet I erred not from thy precepts." The etymology of the English word has been variously given. We agree with Aldis Wright in taking it from *jeu parti*, an even game, in which the chances are equal. The analogy of "hazard" is, we think, strongly in favour of this view, "hazard" being an *unlucky throw* [not in the Old Testament]. Both terms took their origin from games of play, and were transferred to real life as well. Just so "Jacta est alea" was applied to the famous passage of the Rubicon. This idea was not in the Heb., however, with which we may rather compare, for instance:

> "Oh, when the king did throw his warden down,
> His own life hung upon the staff he threw."
>
> *Henry IV.*, Part II., act iv., sc. 1.

2 Samuel xxiv.

THE CENSUS AND THE PESTILENCE.

THE chapter opens:

"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah."

In another part of the record it is said that "Satan" tempted David to number the people (1 Chron. xxi. 1). In this chapter it is explicitly said that the Lord "moved David," saying, "Go, number Israel and Judah." Can there be evil in the city and the Lord not have done it? How many Lords are there? In whose keeping, in the last result, is the universe? There are certain bold inquiries which we must reverently face, and when we come to the point of mystery we must reverently adore, confessing our ignorance, but asserting our willingness, as a very miracle of grace, to wait until the light dissolves the cloud. That Satan was the tempter is unquestionable. It is marvellous, though, how often the divine Being seems to be associated, directly or indirectly, with the temptation, in the sense of the trial and the testing of men. "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." At first a sense of revulsion draws us back, makes us stand aghast at the horrible contradiction and blasphemous irony of such an assertion. Then we say, It is better so: God must have been in this temptation at some point:—"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." So there are points at which we must build altars, saying, All the rest of the line has been a stroke of light, beautiful, lovely, full of solace and of hope; and as for this dark point, let us build here, and cover it as with the sanctuary of God.

Wherein was David's sin in numbering the people? The ideal Israel was a theocracy, with as little outside work as possible, with as little shape and form and mechanism and obtrusiveness as possible; it was to be a spiritual kingdom, ruled over by the unseen Spirit. Did David imagine in his heart that the time had come for the creation of a grand military despotism built on the lines of Phœnicia and of Egypt? Was his last effort in poetry an effort stimulated by ambition? Was he but a man at the best? Does the despot rise up within all kings—even those who sing amongst them most sweetly—saying, Build an empire upon the earth that cannot be shaken; appeal to the senses of the people; hold up before them a throne, and a flag that cannot be mistaken, and rally them round you in patriotic zeal? How could this have been the project of the king, when so crafty and daring a man as Joab opposed the suggestion? Joab undertook to be preacher on the occasion; said he:

"Now the Lord thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?" (v. 3).

When some men preach to us we should take heed: it is not their custom; they are speaking an unknown tongue; they are wielding unfamiliar thunders:—"Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host" (v. 4). So we dismiss the idea of David having in his heart a military despotism, for surely he would have whispered it to such men, and they would have answered it with an emphatic acquiescence. Was it on account of the time that would be wasted in taking the census? From the time of starting until the time of closing nearly ten months were occupied. Could ten months not be better used than by counting heads? Is there not a religious use of time? Do we not fritter away some hours and years in useless reckonings, needless and profitless speculations? That may have been the reason; we cannot tell. But we dwell upon these suggestions to show that they need not be dwelt upon at all. The answer is given by David himself. In the tenth verse we find the secret resolved:

"And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done:

and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly."

So it was a sin of the heart. Better we should not know it in words. Some ghosts cannot be transferred to canvas; they disdain the manifestation of paint; we feel them; we know them well, almost by name. Who can tell what temptations glare upon a man's soul, and say to him, in masonic language, the cipher of perdition, Do this, and win; eat of that tree and live; stand up, and be as God? Is not that human life? The temptations are on the right hand and on the left. If they would speak in our mother tongue we might answer them in some degree, but they speak in allegory, in music heard far away, in suggestions rather than in fully elaborated pictures. They speak of the need of immediate consent. They too have their Gospel words: now is the accepted time, now is the day of satisfaction; whilst the sun shines gather what you may. This is our tragical life. We cannot pray "without ceasing," because our continual prayer is punctuated and marred by suggestions hot as hell. The best men have these visitations; the saints of God have this abiding struggle. Here was a sin in the motive. David does not tell us what his motive was, but he confesses that it was a sinful one: and that is enough for us to know. But what right have we to condemn David if it be a question of motive? Save us from the judgment of motive; deal with our overt actions, and see how keen we are in debate, how agile in self-defence, how gifted in invention, how damnable in genius; but motive—must it be dragged out of the heart's secret place and held up to the sunlight? "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." We are warranted only in dealing with this case because David himself said that his motive was impure, and that his heart had gone astray. How many mysteries could be cleared up if we would look within, and let the heart speak! We have turned mysteries into intellectual riddles; we have made them the subjects of special and appointed controversy; we have appointed a plaintiff and a defendant in this court which we have extemporaneously erected for criticising the mysteries of the universe. Herein is our fatal mistake. What is the explanation of many mysteries? It must be found in the soul; the heart must be

subpœnaed to bear testimony. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

So much for the human side of this transaction. Now let us look at the divine side, and estimate the quality and degree of the wickedness by the punishment with which it was followed.

"Go and say unto David, Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me" (vv. 12, 13).

That is the measure of the iniquity. If we would know what sin is we must know what hell is. We stand aghast at great punishments, but who trembles at great sins? How wonderfully sensitive we are when we see the mysteries of providence expressing themselves in penalties and chastisements almost intolerable! Where is there a man who stands up to vindicate eternal providence and justify the ways of God to men? We need a prophet who will say, Now let us look at the other side of the case; is there not a cause? We say, Why do children die — why should the innocent be punished — why should children in their earliest years be deprived of father, mother, home, friend? How mysterious are the ways of God! Where is there a man who will stand up and say, No more talking like that; or it can only be allowed as an introduction? We must not daub the wall with untempered mortar; we must not heal the hurt of the daughter of God slightly; we must be fundamental. It is useless to dwell with tears upon effects; we ought to dwell with wonder and with a feeling of worship upon causes. But it is at this point that the narrowness of our judgment is revealed, and the littleness of our ways is made known. Ours is a selfish grief. Who lifts his head heavenward, and says, How God must be grieved, how heaven's own snow must be blackened, by these innumerable and infinite wickednesses! Heaven is almost unheavened because of God's grief over man's iniquity. Until we become sterner in our view of sin, we cannot preach Christ's Gospel. It will be to us a beautiful display of spiritual jewellery,

quite a wonderful casket of tender and gracious sentiments, quite a gathering-up upon golden threads of beautiful things, translucent as dew and precious as diamonds; but nothing more; it will not burn, it will not be as a sword among the nations, it will not be first a terror and then a benediction. So God must take up his own cause and show what man's sin is precisely by the punishment which follows it; and that punishment cannot be limited to a day, unless we use the word "day" in other than a literal sense; it must go through the first, second, third, and fourth generations of them that hate him. The hate does not die with the sunset, nor can the judgment die at the gathering of night. Human nature must be looked at in its solidarity, unity, completeness, and we cannot calculate when and where divine punishment may fall. Let us, therefore, look earnestly and pray vehemently, and repent until there be not one entire piece in our hearts, but the whole be shattered, broken, and thus made into a dwelling-place fit for God. Punishment soon makes men religious, at least for the time being. It is pitiful to see how weak the strongest disbeliever is when God continues the pressure of providence upon him. He can endure three days' east wind, remarking merely that the weather is severe; but let him have three weeks of it, and then three months; let it interfere with his seedtime, let it diminish his crop of green things, so that he may have to look otherwhere for the nourishment of his flocks; let it still blow more chillingly than ever, and he says, What is this? Let the earth be dried up and be as a pot of white dust, so that he can find in it no cohesion, no reply to the sun, no flower growing upon all the monotony. Then watch him! When a day of prayer is proposed, he does not wreathe his face into a sardonic smile; rather he says, If anything can be done, let it be done. Poor fool! Unbelief has but few resources; it is soon run to earth, it quickly flees into bankruptcy; only faith can say, Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, I will sing, I will rejoice, I will build mine altar higher; my poverty shall be made an element of my wealth. There is a time, full "nine months and twenty days," when we can number the people, carry out our dreams and ambitions, strut our little hour upon the stage, play such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep; but by mere effluxion of time God transfixes us, until, if

we cannot pray, we begin to whimper like cowards, and to sigh like those who have no more resource. Sometimes, therefore, we have to estimate sin by the punishment which follows it; in other words, sometimes, to estimate at its proper value the cause, we have to dwell upon the effect and work our way back from overt and terrific punishment to spiritual and metaphysical explanation.

"So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men" (v. 15).

And still the pestilence kept outside Jerusalem. But the angel came very near: he stretched out his hand over the city of God, and the Lord said, "It is enough: stay now thine hand;" and the angel was so near Jerusalem that he was actually at "the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite." So near had God's anger come to Zion! And when David saw the angel that smote the people, he said,

"Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house" (v. 17).

So David went forward at the bidding of Gad, the seer, who said: "Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite"—(v. 18)—go and rear an altar almost on the very spot where the temple will one day stand. So, as the king came near,

"Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king" (vv. 21–23).

Let not this be a matter of buying and selling. He offered it unto David. David said: No; not only is this forbidden in the law: I will not offer unto the Lord that which cost me nothing. "So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (v. 24). David would return an equivalent. He would have no borrowed altar; he would not avail himself

of other men's religion. There comes a time when a man's religion affirms itself and justifies itself by distinct, positive, costly sacrifice. We cannot do some things in crowds. We are thankful now and again for a prayer in the great congregation, because it is touched by a pathos impossible to solitude, yet every man must pray his own prayer, give his own tribute, and go through the costly process of self-sacrifice. We are not ashamed of the faith which believes that man must do something before God will cease to afflict. David built his altar, "and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings." And "the Lord was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel" (v. 25). The Lord will lure us or drive us. "The Lord reigneth." We must either fall upon the stone and be broken, or the stone will fall upon us and grind us to powder. "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry." We belong, as Christian thinkers and workers, to those who are not ashamed to confess that before things can be rectified or adjusted and brought back into harmonious and beneficent action, man must do something. What is that something? "Then Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent,"—where every great prophet must begin, where every grand reformation must originate. It must start in self-conviction, in bitterest tears, in self-renunciation, in speechless contrition. God will not be appeased by our controversies, our battles of words, however skilfully and deftly fought; he will only be pleased with repentance towards himself and faith in his Son Jesus Christ. "Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee." What then? Shall the air be rent with song, and the sun be amazed by music, where before he has only heard noise? Shall angels hasten to listen to melody unexpected but not unwelcome? No; that is not the ending of the psalm. Let us read the whole of it:—"Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase," and be a mother to us, nourishing us, answering our hunger with abundance, and our thirst with fountains of water.

"HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,"

FOR ALL GLEANERS.

"*But Abner the son of Ner.*"—2 Sam. ii. 8.

Eccentric men there will always be in society. The word "But" marks Abner as taking a course of his own, and doing that which was pleasing in his own sight. He did not take the common course. Whilst David was being made king at Hebron, Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ish-bosheth and made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. The local limitations of the text are evident, but the moral suggestion is applicable to a large sphere of life. Eccentricity is not always to be blamed. There are some great enough, or small enough, to differ from everybody; they must always have their own course, their own idea, their own way of doing things. Let all workers go on together or separately, as may appear best to them, always remembering, however, that the judgment is at the end, and that the judgment is with God. Sometimes eccentricity is a great blessing in the Church; it destroys monotony, it stimulates inquiry, it rebukes the spirit of infallibility. In the end we shall know who is right and who is wrong. Much time is often wasted by those who differ from the general judgment, and yet that time, though lost, may not be wholly wasted. The majority should sometimes think of its own fallibility. Men are not necessarily right simply because they are parts of an overwhelming multitude. Sometimes the solitary thinker is entrusted with divine stewardship. Often, indeed, the minority has been right in history, and the majority has been wrong. Men should not be eccentric merely for the sake of singularity. That would be mere frivolity, sheer folly, and would end in mischief and disaster. No individual conscience contains the whole sense of righteousness. Conscience, like reason, is the better for friction. There is a quality of righteousness, there is a quality of wisdom, there is a quality of strength,—and this quality can only be realised by intercommunion, by frank and generous interchange of thought and feeling.

"*Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?*"—2 Sam. ii. 26.

Here we have an inquiry which ought to be put under all circumstances that are doubtful, and especially under all circumstances that are marked by selfishness or disregard of the interests of others. The question never is, what is the present feeling, but what will be the ultimate condition. There is night as well as morning, and the darkness must be considered as certainly as the light.

What do things grow to? What is the latter end? "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If a man sow good seed he will reap good fruit. He who sows the wind will reap the whirlwind. This question may be put to every man who is pursuing evil courses:—Say to the indolent, "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?"—say to the drunkard the same thing; say to the debauchee, whose whole thought is taken up with the satisfaction of his passions, the same thing; say also to the gambler, the adventurer, to the man who is boasting immediate success founded upon immoral courses, "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" Remind every one that there is a latter end; that there is a war in which there is no discharge; that there is an audit in which we must give up every account, every voucher, and undergo divine judgment. The whole of our life should be conducted under the consciousness of its latter end. This need not becloud our prospects, depress our spirits, or take the inspiration out of our action: a man may so contemplate his latter end as to know nothing of melancholy; he may rather see in it the beginning of the blessedness that is pure and immortal. We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be bad. Men should always ask themselves this question—"Is it right to obey man rather than God?" Obedience to God may mean present bitterness, present disappointment, and present humiliation, but yet there will be no bitterness in the latter end, only a sweetness as of honey, yea, as of the honeycomb. O that men were wise, that they might know these things, that they would consider their latter end

"*And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain.*"—2 Sam. ii. 29.

We should remind ourselves of such events in order that we may see what has been accomplished by military discipline, by the subordination of merely personal whims and desires. Even conquerors have no easy time in life. We think of success, of triumph, of coronation, but we forget that before these things, and as necessary to them, there must be discipline, suffering, loss, trial of every kind. We read with glowing hearts the accounts of explorers, discoverers, adventurers, who have gone into regions unknown and undreamed-of; and here, again, we forget the night watchings, the night marchings, the continual perils and difficulties of the road. The Apostle Paul makes use of all this aspect of discipline, saying, "They do it to obtain a corruptible crown," and his argument is that if men will do so much for a crown that must fade, what ought they to do who are struggling for a crown eternal? If men are so anxious to win the prizes of earth, what ought they to be to win the infinitely greater prizes of heaven? Self-denial is not confined to Christian experience. Whoever would be great in any department or relation of life must know the pain of self-mortification—must, in other words, achieve the mastery over himself—must, so to say, stand upon himself in an attitude of triumph. We cannot dream ourselves into heaven, nor can we dream ourselves into any form of greatness that is really worthy of realisation. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life,—into life of every kind, of eminence, of usefulness, of truest pleasure, and most lasting renown.

"*To translate the kingdom.*"—2 Sam. iii. 10.

That is to say, to hand over the kingdom from one man to another. The kingdom was to pass from the house of Saul to the house of David, and David was to be king "over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba." The thought is that kingdoms of an earthly kind change hands, and therefore they are to be regarded as belonging to things temporary and mutable, and not to things eternal and unchangeable. What hast thou that thou hast not received? The kingdom did not belong to Saul, except in a secondary sense, for God still retained the kingdom in his own hands; he setteth up, and he bringeth down; he creates the prince, and he sets the beggar in his lowly place. By long use men come to entertain the idea of sole proprietorship, and thus the sense of monopoly increases. Our children are not ours, they are God's; our lives are not our own, they belong to the Creator; we have nothing, except in the sense of stewardship and in the sense of involving responsibility for the use we make of it. Blessed is he who can say, amid the transition of kingdom and influence of every name and kind, "He must increase, but I must decrease." It is well that men can only reign for a certain time; it would be well if royalty could change its point of origin, so that human vanity might be checked and human ambition might be baffled in many a course. We are not to think of earthly kingdoms alone as meaning political sovereignties; we are to think of personal influence, institutional functions, and all arrangements made to meet the necessity of the present day: all these things must be changed in order to be purified; the direction may be altered in order that attention may be wakened; those who imagine themselves secure for ever must be shaken out of their security, that they may learn that there is no permanence but in God. The Lord reigneth. All men reign under him, and are subject to his will. They only are happy who use the world as not abusing it, and who hold it with so light a hand that at any moment they can lay it down again.

"*I am this day weak, though anointed king.*"—2 Sam. iii. 39.

Here is a remarkable distinction between the human and the official. What a tone of humiliation there is in the latter part of the text! Two men seem to be speaking here—the one the man pure and simple, the other the man clothed with royal purple and loaded with a royal crown. Officialism does nothing towards the sustenance of humanity. Sometimes a man's office is greater than a man's strength. In all these circumstances it is the man who is to be considered, and not the officer. As the life is more than meat, so the man is more than the king; as the body is more than raiment, so the soul is more than the sovereign. It is most instructive to listen to the confessions of weakness made by kings and men who have all that the world can give them. It is too frequently supposed that if we had crown, and throne, and sceptre, and gilded palace, we should be content and strong, yea, even riotous in the overflow of power: nothing of the kind. All history shows us that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. We suppose that only poor men complain of being weak; yet here we have a king telling us that weakness has invaded the palace, and that weakness has thrown into contempt all the glamour and pomp of courts. Periods of weakness may be so used as to be the occasions of growing

strength. One man was enabled to exclaim, "When I am weak, then am I strong." When our weakness is rightly felt we are driven to God for the renewal of our strength. All our springs are in him. He only can recover the soul from its moods of dejection, and build up our flesh into reality of power. So, again and again, in all conditions and varieties of life, we are brought back from heart-wandering and self-trusting to simple dependence upon the living and eternal God.

"... *his hands were feeble.*"—2 SAM. iv. 1.

The man spoken of was Saul's son, and as the son of a king what reason had he to have enfeebled hands?—The reason is, that Abner was dead.—But could not a king's son do without Abner?—Have not king's sons abundant resources in themselves, without being dependent upon outsiders however distinguished?—All history replies in the negative.—Men belong to one another.—The king's son was nothing without Abner, but much with him. The unit one is but a singular number, but the moment a cipher is added to it it becomes ten, and another cipher turns the ten into a hundred.—The integer is little by itself, the cipher is nothing at all when it stands alone, but when they are brought together they begin to make themselves felt.—It is precisely so in our social relations.—What is the husband without the wife?—What is the son without the father?—What is the scholar without the teacher?—What is the flock without the shepherd?—It is of no account to reason that there is a variety of value in men, some being worth much, and others being worth little; the fact is that they must all be brought into co-operation, and in their unity they must begin to realise their strength.—The pastor without the Church is almost powerless; the Church without the pastor is as sheep not having a shepherd.—In proportion to a man's greatness will he value the help of others.—His very greatness, provided it be intellectual and moral, will enable him to see that every man has his value and his importance in society, and that the more men are entrusted with influence the more they are developed in moral dignity, provided the conscience be pure, and the motive of the whole life be unselfish and lofty.—It would seem as if Jesus Christ himself felt that he needed the presence and sympathy of his disciples.—Once he said, "Will ye also go away?"—True, he could have done without them all, but in a higher truth he needed them all, and he failed not to make them feel how near and dear they were to all his loftiest solicitudes.

"*David went on, and grew great.*"—2 SAM. v. 10.

Greatness that comes by growth is the most permanent.—The proverb says some men have greatness thrust upon them; such greatness often falls off like an incubus, being wholly out of proportion to the man to whom it is momentarily attached.—"Went on,"—step by step, little by little, sometimes patently, sometimes imperceptibly, still to the eye that could see all vital processes the progress was continual and uninterrupted, and in one definite direction.—"Grew,"—did not force himself, acted in co-operation with the laws of nature and the laws of society; grew in knowledge, grew in wisdom, grew in capacity.—The result of such going on and such growing was greatness: not greatness in mere bulk, but great-

ness in the highest qualities,—greatness in mind, thought, feeling, purpose, beneficence.—When a man grows great physically, socially, and officially, and does not keep up a corresponding growth of intelligence and sympathy, he grows towards tyranny and selfishness; but when the official and the moral keep pace, then all the greatness achieved by the growing man is so much contributed to the welfare of society.—The reason of David's progress and growth is given, "the Lord God of hosts was with him."—It was, then, a religious greatness, and it was such greatness as God himself created and approved; God set the crown upon the head of this loftiness, and glorious was the man who was to be the king of Israel.—Glory that is not connected with the Lord God of hosts is a feeble flicker; it dies whilst it shines; it is merely superficial; it is not connected with the great fire-system of the universe.—The difference between a lighted candle and the sun at mid-day, is that the one is a continually decreasing quantity, going out by the very effort of shining, exhausting itself by giving itself away: but the sun in the heavens is as brilliant now as when he first shone upon the system which he rules.—The man who is religiously great has bread to eat which the world knoweth not of: he is not dependent upon circumstances for his progress and growth: he grows from the centre towards the circumference: he grows from the inward to the outward; he grows from lofty and tender spiritual conceptions towards broad and generous charities.—When God has resolved upon a man's greatness the world cannot hinder that man going straightforward to the throne.—He may be interrupted, he may be criticised, he may be violently opposed, he may be traduced; yea, all the army of darkness may set itself in array against him, but the Lord of hosts being upon his side, his enthronement and coronation are guaranteed.—What is true of all good men is true of all good causes; they have to undergo the whole process of scrutiny, suspicion, criticism; but just in proportion as they are good will they rise above all cloud and storm, and pass through every difficulty, and establish themselves in the confidence and gratitude of society.

"*And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments.*"—2 SAM. vi. 5.

Variety of worship is an idea suggested by this circumstance.—All the instruments differed one from the other, but the subject of the holy song was the same: all the music spoke the same eloquence and adored the same Lord.—The instruments were made of fir wood; they were harps, psalteries, timbrels, cornets and cymbals; and all these various instruments concurred in one lofty and thrilling tribute of praise.—What applies to instruments applies to faculties and to attributes of every kind offered upon the altar of religion to the glory and honour of God. One man has a harp, another has a timbrel, another a cornet, and another clashes the cymbals to express his religious emotion and aspiration: one man is eloquent, another liberal, another sympathetic, another wise in counsel, another tender in prayer, another powerful in argument; all these are required to make up the great ministry of the cross.—The ministry is not fully represented in any one man; it is only represented in the sum total of its members.—The harp must not be silent because the psaltery is not played, or the cornet, or the cymbals.—If the harp cannot have company, it must offer its own tribute; even if the

cymbals have to be heard alone they must not be ashamed of their offering.—Better indeed that all the instruments should concur in one sacred offering of praise, but if any instrument persist in keeping silence, the silent instrument must not deter others from doing what they can to extend the kingdom and multiply the praise of God.—The greatest mistake which the Church can make is to turn monotony into an idol.—This is a practical danger.—How much like one another are ministers of the Gospel! Who can tell one clergyman from another?—What a disposition there is to formulate all worship, to give it iron shape and inflexible direction.—Where is individuality? where is spontaneity? Where is enthusiasm?—Because the harp is not a cymbal, is it therefore not an instrument of music?—Because the timbrel differs from the cornet, is it therefore unworthy to express the praise of Almighty God?—Some men are learned, dry, tedious, and to popular criticism they present the aspect of nuisances; but they are really doing a very necessary and effective work in the Church, in guarding many approaches to the citadel against the attacks of men who are cultivated, subtle, and desperate in their hostility.—Other men are popular because they are eloquent, effective, almost ostentatious in service, and they are apt to be sneered at by those who are labouring in secret, toiling over difficult passages of history, and searching into the meaning of recondite terms and usages.—All this is worse than useless; it is most mischievous, it is divisive, it is enfeebling, it is disheartening.—The complete idea of praise is that which brings within its range all manner of men, all manner of instruments, and all manner of methods.—As the Church grows in wisdom and in love it will grow in inclusiveness of recognition and sympathy.

"David returned to bless his household."—2 SAM. vi. 20.

David had been bringing up the ark from Kirjath-jearim; the ark had rested in the house of Obed-edom; David brought the ark into Zion with sacrifices, and he danced before it, and he placed it in the tabernacle with great joy and feasting,—"As soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts."—The history says, "All the people departed every one to his own house;" and then it adds, "David returned to bless his household."—Public worship does not obviate the necessity of private worship.—There should be a church in every house.—Every hearthstone should have its sacred altar; the clear way from every window in the house should be a path ending only in heaven.—What avail is it that a man has served the public if he has neglected his own family? Of what advantage is it that a man has been most eloquent to others, and most silent to those of his own household? Pitiful indeed is the life of the man who is most popular with those who know him least, and who is but scantily welcomed by those who live with him in common family relations. There is indeed an exception to this household enthusiasm in the instance given in this chapter; for Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David and reproached him, being out of sympathy with his religious enthusiasm.—Michal was to blame, not David.—David said, "It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore will I play before the Lord."—Where a man has unfortunately married a wife who is not in sympathy with him, he

must not cast all the responsibility upon other people; he fashioned the sword with which he is pierced; he kindled the fire which leaps upon him like an avenging flame.—The lesson is that men ought not to enter into relationships that are not deeply sympathetic; if there is any disparity as to religious conviction and religious enthusiasm, it will tell in the long run upon family peace.—At first when passion burns and love has taken leave of reason there may be an apparent smoothness in all the outlying way; but when reason begins to assume its function, and life settles down into its ordinary levels, and the daily wear and tear of business is felt, then it will be seen that there is no true union that does not begin in religious identity of sympathy and purpose.—Where the house is divided upon religion it is divided fatally; no compromise can create an enduring truce: a profound mistake was made at the beginning, and it will exert its disastrous influence until the dissolution of the unhappy bond.

"*Is this the manner of man, O Lord God?*"—2 SAM. vii. 19.

David was surprised by the greatness of the divine promise.—Not only did the Lord speak of David himself, but he spake of David's house, saying of his son, "He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him."—This astounded David; he said Thou hast not only spoken well of me, "thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come." David saw in the divine procedure a method that was contrary to all known analogies. — This is what we must always see in the Scripture, and in all the religion which it discloses.—The Bible realises its greatness in its distinctiveness. — When we read it we say, Is this the manner of our books? The same characterises the whole service of Jesus Christ.—The people who heard him, said, "Never man spake like this man;" and others said, "What manner of man is this?"—Jesus Christ cautioned his disciples against merely mimicking the good manners of the pagans; he said, "What do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?"—When he left his disciples, he said, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."—If Christianity is a mere variety of religion, if it is one of a hundred other systems, if it is willing to sit down amongst them, and to take what applause it can extract from men in competition with other religions, then indeed it is not worth receiving, certainly not worth dying for; it is when the Christian religion discloses its uniqueness that it discloses its unapproachableness; when it does for men what no other religion can do, then it shows how truly it came out of heaven from God. — We are not called upon to exhibit a common morality, but a special spirituality.

"*Let us play the men for our people.*"—2 SAM. x. 12.

The Old Testament continually calls men to courage.—The Bible would seem to be the enemy of all timidity, all moral cowardice, all bodily shrinking from danger and loss.—Read the exhortations of God to Joshua; read passages related to this verse: their whole tone is identical, being a tone of urging men to put on their strength, to

arouse their courage to its highest fashion, and to go forward with steadfastness and zeal and hopefulness in all difficult service.—"Let us play the men,"—let us be strong, noble, energetic, alive in every point, putting away from us all that is feeble and emasculating in sentiment.—There is always another manhood deeper than the one we have yet realised: a larger self, an intenser force; let us call up all that is deepest and strongest within us, and as danger thickens let us rise in courage.—Courage would seem to be but another word for faith.—Courage is the Old Testament word, faith is the New Testament word.—The courageous man does not fail if his cause be good; though he fall he shall rise again, though many enemies spring upon him he shall be enabled to throw them all off, and carry forward his processes to their fullest fruition.—We should say, "Lord, increase our faith: Lord, increase our courage;" we should accept the exhortation of the prophet, "Put on thy strength."

"*By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.*"—2 SAM. xii. 14.

We are to consider what effect our conduct will have upon outsiders, upon observers who are not kindly disposed towards us or towards our religion.—It is in vain to suppose that our evil deeds can be hidden, or can be shorn of their influence, or can be limited to the mere date and occasion of their committal.—Even where they are not known publicly they leave their impress upon ourselves; we are weakened by them; our heart is lowered in courage and in moral temperature, and we who might have gone forward like giants refreshed are willing to make any concession or accept any compromise, or settle down upon any terms of humiliation.—Every good man would seem to hold the reputation of God in his keeping.—Every professor of religion does this in a certain sense.—When the Christian does that which is wrong he brings Jesus Christ himself into disrepute, he crucifies the Son of God afresh; not only does the man himself do that which is evil, but he humbles and grieves the Son of God.—The soldier who wears the national uniform aggravates every evil he does by the very fact that he represents the power and grandeur of an empire.—For other men to be cowards is bad enough, but for a soldier to be cowardly is unpardonable.—For a man of the world to do that which is wrong or unjust is shameful in a high degree, but when a Christian does this he violates all the commandments of God, all the instincts of the new life, and the whole inspiration which he is supposed to derive from Jesus Christ.—The contrary argument is of great effect on behalf of Christianity: when Christian men do good they make observers think that the fountain at which they refresh their spiritual life must be heavenly, not earthly; when they forgive their enemies, when they kindly use those who despitefully entreat them, they begin to excite wonder as to the origin of their feeling and the inspiration of their motive.—Holiness is an argument. Charity is a mighty weapon of defence.—A forgiving spirit is an eloquent sermon.

"*While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?*"—2 SAM. xii. 22.

David had been afflicted because of the sin which he had committed.—The prophet had foretold that the child that was to be born unto him should surely

die.—In fulfilment of this prophecy the Lord struck the child, and it was very sick.—David, though a guilty sinner, had a tender heart.—Above all the tumult of his wrongdoing there came the voice of prayer and intercession.—David besought God for the child, and fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.—"The elders of his house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died."—Now David shows another aspect of his character,—the strong, soldierly, royal aspect.—He had fought a battle, and lost it; he would not give up hope so long as life flickered in the pulse; he wrestled with death, and would have thrown the grim monster if he could; but death was not to be pacified by his tears or to be driven away by all his prayers.—A marvellous tribute is paid to God's goodness in this very confession of David, "Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me?"—he had seen so many acts of graciousness on the part of God; God had so often turned away from wrath, and rejoiced in mercy; he had overlooked so much, delivered from so many dangers, interposed in so many crises, that David had a lingering hope that even yet, though the sword was lifted high, it would be turned aside, and the little child should be permitted to live.—We must accept the providences of heaven alike when they are blessings and when they are judgments.—In this case the providence was a judgment, and David accepted it, saying, "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."—Thus we have to fall into the march of the divine providence; we have to note the rhythm of the heavenly movement and keep in step with it; and this being so, our resignation will be accepted as repentance, and our obedience accounted as prayer.—The man had sinned, sinned deeply, sinned all but unpardonably; yet, account for it as we may, there was something in him which God could not but look upon with complacency; the very seed of heaven was in him, and he had a great election to realise and justify.—So it may be with many of us.—We have great sins, but our love may be greater than our guilt.—After all we have done, enough indeed to darken all heaven as with a frown, it may be that the voice of God within us shall be stronger than the voice of temptation, and out of great sin and infinite danger, we may be brought to peace, restoration, and eternal blessedness.—Let no man trifle with these hopes, or these sacred promises; they were not meant to be trodden under foot, or to be made excuses for redoubling our sin; they were meant to deter us from the repetition of evil, and to encourage us in our upward way.

"*For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.*"
—2 SAM. xiv. 14.

Is this an illustration of the kind of inspiration which is often granted to woman in contradistinction to the degree and quality granted to man?—We have two distinct views of life in this verse:—(1) There is the commonplace meditation upon human mortality, and a very simple but graphic figure of water spilled upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again; as true as this is of water so is it of the body of man when he falls back into his elemental dust.—The decree of death is universal: God doth not respect any

person ; the old and the young die on the same day, and the weak man has as much security as the strong man against the fatal arrow.—(2) Yet here is a singular suggestion by which some hint of immortality is given ; God devises means that his banished be not expelled from him : however many local and narrow meanings these words may have, the heart will not refuse to see in them some groping after the immortality of the soul.—That immortality does not fall within the scope of human conjecture, yet it comes within the range of religious faith : the woman remits the question to God ; she knows what his resources are, and she pays to providence the tribute of being able to find means by which even death shall be vanquished.—What was a dim imagining to her instinct is a glorious truth to our Christian faith.—We have no doubt whatever respecting immortality, and we should act as if we had no such doubt ; but on the contrary how often we act as if we had no prospect beyond the tomb.—We speak of those who die as poor creatures, we weep over them as if they had fallen into nothingness, we speak of them as mere shadows and memories ; yet all the while by a most perverse irony we profess to believe in the immortality and blessedness of the righteous.—Thus we contradict our own faith, and expose our own theology to remorseless criticism and contempt.—Those who believe in Christ's view of the future should rejoice over death ; or whatever mournfulness enters into their feeling and their tone should relate to themselves and not to the sainted and glorified dead. —Jesus Christ hath brought life and immortality to light : the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.—Let us know the exact limit of death, and we shall find that it is restricted to the body, and has no reference whatever to the redeemed and sanctified spirit.—The destiny of that spirit is undertaken by Jesus Christ himself, and because he has triumphed, that spirit shall have triumph, and so long as he is enthroned that spirit shall have joy in ever-increasing and ever-blessed service.—Christians ought to be jealous lest pagans excel them in faith ; that is to say, lest the conjectures of Paganism should be turned into more comforting realities than are the revelations of Christianity itself.—The New Testament saint should take care lest his faith be eclipsed by the trust of Old Testament believers.—The Church of to-day should be an advance upon the Church of every former day, in the clearness of its faith, in the intensity of its love, in the assurance of its appropriated blessings.—Grow in grace.

"*Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*"—2 SAM. xv. 6.

The rogue has often greater opportunities than the honest man.—The way of falsehood is often smoother than the way of truth.—Honesty must pause, and take into consideration interests, possibilities, and responsibilities, which dishonesty at once ignores.—Absalom had set his heart upon a certain policy, and everything went down before his prosecution of it : he would do justice where others had been unjust ; he would be beneficent where others had been selfish ; he would see that every man had his rights.—He humbled himself so far, "that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him."—Falsehood, therefore, can be popular.—We must not infer that a cause is good simply because it is popular.—Take the case of Absalom as an illustration.—How possible it is to be saying kind things with the lips, and yet feeling cruelty in the heart ! How awful

is this possibility of self-contradiction, so that the man shall be two men, the heart shall be two hearts, the policy shall be two policies, and every word shall have two meanings.—In the case of Absalom we find the very refinement of selfishness.—Nothing is too mean for him to do; no appearance is too humiliating for him to assume; he studies what the people like, and he grants them all their preferences with rough-and-ready generosity.—We should distinguish carefully between initial processes and resulting policies.—Men can be very smooth before gaining their way, but having once secured it they show their real selves.—Knaves, however condescending, gracious, and conciliatory, should be treated in their native character, and driven away from the door of every honest household.—When good things are done by bad men they become bad.—The kiss of hollow friendship is a falsehood.—The promise that means self-promotion never can be fulfilled in the sense in which it is received by the dupe.—The cure for all this is a new heart.—In the absence of the new birth all other processes are superficial and futile.—They may look well, they may even be tempting and fascinating, but in the soul of them they are a lie and a treachery.—Let us take care who governs our hearts.—The heart should never be given away under its own value.—He only can give the heart full return for its confidence who redeemed that heart, and opened up to mankind all the prospects and allurements of a blessed immortality.—The Lord is king of the heart; Christ alone should occupy the throne of the affections; when our heart is in Christ's keeping and is continually under Christ's discipline, there is no fear of its straying away to false altars, or seeking fruit in forbidden paths.—Son, give me thine heart!

"*It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.*"—2 SAM. xvi. 12.

David thus shows how thoroughly he had entered into the divine spirit.—He had seen that all resentment and self-defence amounted to nothing.—The resources of one man can be overcome by the resources of another man.—We only have resources equal to every emergency in life when we feel that at our disposal are the unsearchable riches of Christ.—"Commit thy way unto the Lord: avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."—Here is Christianity before the Christian era.—What more can any Christian do than David did when he was cursed and stoned by Shimei?—Jesus Christ says, "If thine enemy smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also."—David seems to have entered into the spirit of that injunction, for, instead of taking the case into his own hand, he commended himself to the keeping and protection of God.—Cursing well borne may lead to the bestowal of blessing from on high.—A great principle is involved in this possibility.—We undertake our own defence far too much.—We are fretful, resentful, anxious to see justice inflicted upon those who have been cruel towards us; whereas if we lived in the very Spirit of Christ, we should remit all such matters to the providence of God, assured that if a man do evil he will bring that evil upon himself, and he will fall into the pit which he has digged for others.—How lovely is a quiet spirit, how beautiful is patience, how noble is resignation!—How much greater a man is David in this case than if he had called for a sword and pursued the fool who cursed him!—

Prayer is mightier than controversy; patience is grander than revenge; we can only be taught the supreme value of moral qualities and attributes after long study in the school of Christ.—Resignation is never weakness.—The spirit that can resign itself to the providence of God is a spirit that can take a large view of life, that can connect the seedtime and the harvest, the beginning and the end, and that never rushes at conclusions, but patiently abides the evolution of the divine will.—By examining ourselves on this ground we see exactly what progress we have made in the Christian course.

"*Shimei . . . threw stones at him.*"—2 SAM. xvi. 13.

The man at whom the stones were thrown was David.—Shimei was a coward as well as a profane person, for he took care to walk along the hill's side over against David, and to throw stones from a distance.—We must not be dismayed because men throw stones at us.—Many stones are thrown which never reach their mark.—Stone-throwing may be an indication of cowardice, of an evil temper, of fretfulness, and of a spirit in no wise attractive.—How difficult it is for some people to believe that a man can be right when other people are throwing stones at him!—They say: How can he be a good man when he is so evil spoken of?—How can he be wise when his policy is so much condemned?—How can he be good when he has so many enemies?—Reasoning of this kind would destroy the claim of Jesus Christ himself to be considered the Son of God.—We ought to reason by an exactly contrary process, saying: How great is he when so many envy him!—How good when so many oppose him!—How wise when so few comprehend him!—Burglars do not go to houses in which there are no riches or goods worthy of their attention.—They do not go to half-built houses, but to houses wherein they expect to find treasure.—Thieves do not go to orchards in the winter-time, but in the time when every branch is bowed down with heavy fruitage.—When a man is thought worthy of public criticism, possibly there may be something in him that is of the highest quality.—Jesus Christ was more opposed than any man who ever lived, and the reason is that no man could approach him in excellence, in dignity, in beneficence.—Be sure that you do not deserve the stones.—Remember the proverb which says that ashes always fly in the face of him who throws them.

"*I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed.*"—2 SAM. xvii. 2.

Such was the policy of Ahitophel.—Bad men always reveal themselves at some point of their tortuous and ignoble policy.—It may be only a stray sentence, but the revelation is not the less vivid and complete.—See how nobly this bad man reasoned!—He said he would come upon David when David was weary and weak handed.—Knavery can never be noble-minded.—Bad men can never rise beyond their own level; find them where we may, they are always conceiving cowardly and ungenerous and self-defeating plots.—The incident is useful to us as showing the policy which is pursued by our spiritual enemy; "Your adversary the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."—The tempter came upon Eve when she was alone.—He has always come upon men in their hours of depression,—when health has been feeble, when business has been unprosperous, when family affairs have gathered overhead like a frowning cloud,

when there has been unusual care and anxiety in the heart.—The devil is not a brave tempter; he is "that old serpent the devil;" he lurks in secret places, he watches for moments of weakness, he never invites to fair, open encounter; he plots, and conspires, and works in the dark, and strikes from behind, and in very deed and in every way shows himself to be a devil.—What is true of the master is true of the servant.—All who follow the devil are selfish, wily, knavish, wanting in every attribute of chivalry and generosity.—They cannot be otherwise, and this is the fact that must be borne in mind by all Christian teachers and reformers.—The devil can only assume the garb of an angel of light: an angel of light he can never be in reality.—Even when the devil quotes Scripture we must disbelieve him, for he quotes the Scripture only partially, and perversely applies it, and seeks to make it a medium of spiritual ruin.—Men should have their attention more and more called to the meanness of wickedness,—not only is it hateful as wickedness, but it is hateful because of its meanness, cunning, calculation, and willingness to strike a man when he is weary and weak handed.—On the other side we must remember the promises of God.—Whilst we are fainting we may yet be pursuing.—At the throne of grace the fainthearted may renew their courage.—Christ's sweetest invitations and promises are addressed to those who are weary and heavy laden.—What time we are afraid we should trust in God.—When our father and our mother forsake us, our look should be upward, not downward.—We should remember, too, that enemies are always on the alert.—They may not be noisy, ostentatious, self-proclaiming; they may be silent, concealed, watchful: let us be sure, however, that they are always on our track, always waiting for our halting, and always gratified when we are in fear and weakness.—Through all this let us listen to the voice which says, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

"... *thou art worth ten thousand of us.*"—2 SAM. xviii. 3.

David was determined to go forth with the people, but they resisted and said, "Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us; but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore, now it is better that thou succour us out of the city."—This was a right estimate of human worth.—Whilst there is a sense in which one man is as good as another, there is a larger sense in which one man may be equal to ten thousand.—Cæsar was greater than all his legions.—Sometimes a name carries with it magic.—To know that such a man is in the war or in the council, is to know precisely how war and council will end.—Sometimes it is better to serve a cause intellectually than in a military sense.—The sword will cut down the greatest as well as the meanest.—We may actually, therefore, be showing more bravery by devoting our attention to the moral aspect and the intellectual need of the case, than by going forth with sword and buckler and spear.—When some men are taken out of the way the hearts of other men are filled with dismay.—So long as men of magical name and influence live, their very life is an inspiration to their followers.—We should be careful not to expose our leaders to needless danger.—The people showed a true and philosophical economy by requesting David to keep out of the way of physical danger, and to help the nation by prayer and counsel and music and words of stimulus and inspiration.—The king accepted the position, saying, "What

seemeth you best I will do," and he who was a leader of soldiers, the very captain and glory of the army, "stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands."—We may be great in waiting. —We may serve most by doing least. —In the Christian warfare we must not abuse this doctrine; we must remember that the Christian warfare is throughout spiritual, not carnal, and that every man is called to go forth to this war to fight for himself and to fight for the general good.—This is not a battle in which some men may remain at home merely for the sake of giving counsel; they can give the best counsel by showing the best example.—Armour is provided for every man, exactly adapted to his stature, and to the conditions under which he is to do battle, and to the peculiarity of his temperament.— "Take unto you the whole armour of God."—This does not destroy the difference between one Christian leader and another, nor between Christian leaders and their followers.—There are great men in the Church,—great psalmists, great expositors, great preachers, great defenders of the faith, men who are mighty in prayer and mighty in sympathy.—There is nothing monotonous in all the providence of God over his Church: even its commonplaces are miracles; even the smallest men in the Church are greater than the mightiest men outside.—Jesus Christ declared this to be the case in reference to John the Baptist—how much more so in reference to those who have neither John's intellectual capacity or intensity of spiritual consecration?

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS.

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH.

ISRAEL was but a small nation at the first, consequently its division into two rival monarchies at the close of the reign of Solomon could not but weaken its influence, as well as destroy its tranquillity. The ruin of the whole people was certainly signified by this untoward event. Up to this time, its invasion upon the Gentiles had been marked by abounding success, but henceforward the Gentiles found themselves oppressed by a greatly weakened enemy. The disruption was foretold by Ahijah to Jeroboam during the reign of Solomon. In its proper place we shall see that the prediction was dramatically delivered. Ahijah found Jeroboam in the way as he "went out of Jerusalem," and "they two were alone in the field: and Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: and he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces." Rehoboam, the son and successor of Solomon, missed an opportunity of conciliating the whole people and bringing them to a loyal acceptance of his reign and will. Rehoboam, however, rejected every thought of approach as between himself and the people, and trusted to his power to stamp out the threatened rebellion. When he went to be crowned at Shechem, the people, headed by Jeroboam, presented a respectful petition, asking the king for some relief from the oppressive burdens which his father had laid upon them. Rehoboam took three days to consider the matter.

The old men who had stood before Solomon his father advised that Rehoboam should meet the people in a generous and confiding spirit: "Speak good words to them; then they will be thy servants for ever." On the contrary, Rehoboam consulted the young men, and they advised that he should meet the people in a hostile spirit. Rehoboam's reply was: "My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke; my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." This violent reply to a conciliatory approach was answered by the cry: "What portion have we in David? . . . To your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David." Then came the revolt, and the seceding tribes lost no time in consolidating themselves into the kingdom of Israel. Jeroboam was the first king, and reigned twenty-two years. "When all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel." Rehoboam would have attacked his rival. He assembled a great army, amounting to "an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men which were warriors." The order for the attack was, however, withdrawn: "Return every man to his house: for this thing is from me." Rehoboam was thus left alone in ignoble solitude, and Jeroboam entered into the realisation of the promise—"If thou wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in mine eyes, I will build thee a sure house." This was the message which God had sent to the prophet Ahijah. Jeroboam was ultimately defeated in an attack on Judah. He was defeated by Abijah king of Judah, and three border cities with their districts, Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephrain, were taken from him.

Nothing is said by the historian of the kings about the defeat of Jeroboam; he simply refers to the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel and mentions that Jeroboam reigned twenty-two years. Nadab was the second king of Israel, and he reigned two years, being altogether unfit to encounter the complicated difficulties

of the position. Nadab was a man of no character, weaker even than Jeroboam, and he consequently sought to live if not an idle yet a self-indulgent life. Baasha was the third king of Israel, and he reigned four-and-twenty years. He was known throughout his country as a self-seeking usurper. Then came Elah, who reigned two years; and after him Zimri, fifth king of Israel, who reigned for one week only. Strictly speaking, Zimri never ruled over Israel; he simply reigned seven days in Tirzah, that is to say, he held the capital until the army had time to come from Gibbethon to take his place and establish Omri, who reigned twelve years. Then succeeded Ahab in a reign of twenty-two years; Ahaziah reigned two years; Jehoram, twelve; Jehu, twenty-eight; Jehoahaz, seventeen; Joash, sixteen. Jeroboam II. reigned longer than any of them, certainly not less than forty-one years. Zachariah reigned six months; Shallum, one month; Menahem, ten years; Pekahiah, two years; Pekah, nearly thirty years; Hoshea, nine years. Hoshea was thus the nineteenth and last king of Israel. Hoshea was guilty of treason in attempting to treat with Egypt,—an attempt which ended in his being cast into prison. It is a singular circumstance that Jeroboam the first king, and Hoshea the last king of Israel, both looked to Egypt for help. But Egypt could render no assistance as the king had neglected to pay his yearly tribute. We read: "The king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea." "Therefore" he "shut him up, and bound him in prison." As to the way, manner, or time, we know nothing. It is supposed that the imprisonment took place about the seventh year of Hoshea's reign. Though nominally continuing king for two or three years after his imprisonment, Hoshea disappears at this point, and is never heard of again. And "as for Samaria," the prophet says, "her king is cut off, as the foam upon the water" (Hos. x. 7), "utterly cut off," "in a morning" (Hos. x. 15). Samaria did indeed hold out for three years against the assaults of Assyria. The historian of the kings merely notes: "In

the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria." Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah refer to the subject in occasional graphic touches.

Among the kings of Judah we find Asa, who was the third king, of whom it is said—"He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father;" "his heart was perfect with the Lord all his days." Asa's career as king was long-continued, and during his one-and-forty years his success was distinctly above the average. Asa was known as a reformer, one who was determined to root out abominations of long standing, and to prove himself the implacable opponent of idolatry in every form. We shall find it noted of him that he did not spare even his mother Maacah in this matter of idolatry: he deposed her from the rank of queen-mother, struck down her idol, stamped it and burnt it, and strewed its ashes on the Kidron.

The reign of Jehoshaphat was memorable in the annals of Judah. His action has been summarised thus: "He appointed, or rather re-appointed, minor courts of justice, removing abuses; he also organised superior courts of judicature for the final settlement of causes, both civil and ecclesiastical, throughout the cities of his kingdom; and established at the same time a supreme court of appeal in the capital. Thus there lay an appeal from the minor courts to the provincial, and from the provincial to the decision of the metropolitan court . . . neither did he neglect the army, but raised it to a state of great efficiency under five generals of distinction. The size of this army, indeed, is so great, reaching to the high figure of 1,160,000 men, that many good authorities have suspected that an error has crept into the numbers . . . of this army he made Jerusalem the headquarters; at the same time he fortified the fenced cities, making them garrison towns, and stationed a strong force on the northern frontier against the possibility of danger from that quarter: his reforms were thus threefold—educational or religious, judicial, and military." Concerning Jehosha-

phat we have this testimony in the book of Chronicles: "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto Baalim; but sought to the Lord God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel."

In an evil hour Jehoshaphat entered into an alliance with Ahab, by permitting his son Jehoram to marry Athaliah, the wicked daughter of parents, if possible, still more wicked, namely, Ahab and Jezebel. The excuse for this alliance was supposed to be the growing kingdom of Syria, and the inevitable peril both to Israel and Judah. Jehoshaphat was succeeded by his son, Jehoram. From this point, for a time, the names of the two royal houses of Israel and Judah are identical: in Israel the names were Ahaziah and Jehoram; in Judah, Jehoram and Ahaziah. Jehoram reigned alone five years, and taking into account his associate reign with his father he reigned altogether eight years. His reign began with the shedding of blood, and it was brought to a termination by a foul disease. Jehoram's accession was marked by the murder of his six brothers, being no doubt instigated thereto by his wife Athaliah, in very deed a daughter of Jezebel.

The fifth king of Judah was Ahaziah. He reigned only one year, and his epitaph, if it may be so called, was written in these words—"He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab." We read of him: "His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab; for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction." Probably there is no ghastlier picture in all history than that a man should be seduced to his ruin, not by a stranger or an avowed enemy, but by the influence of his own mother. Athaliah attempted to usurp the throne. She attempted to raise a cry of treason when the young and legitimate king was brought forward. Proclamation was made amidst tumultuous cheering and

blowing of trumpets, the Levites and the people emulating one another in shouting, "God save the king:" Athaliah rent her robes, and cried out, "Treason, Treason:" but no answer came back to that cry of despair. Borne away into the Kidron valley, the fatal blow was delivered, and the career of the wicked woman was dramatically closed.

When the appalling career of Ahab and Jezebel was thus brought to an end, the youthful Joash was placed on the ancestral throne, and Jehoiada was regent during his minority. Joash was the one surviving descendant of David. Again and again we have seen how brittle became the thread on which the divine government seemed to be suspended. At this time everything would appear to have depended upon the life of the child Joash. But man's extremity, we are often told, is God's opportunity; the frail life was spared and sustained, and so the lamp of David's house ceased not to burn. Along with the royal restoration came the revival of the priestly order in the person of Jehoiada. Joash made himself infamous by the stoning of Zechariah between the temple and the altar. The Bible comment is this: "He remembered not the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but slew his son." Jesus Christ refers to the event thus: "From the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah who was slain between the temple and the altar." Asa had imprisoned a prophet; Amaziah had imposed silence upon religious teachers; but Joash alone completed this hostile policy by a deed of blood. But the Lord's hand was heavy upon Joash. In his person the first deed of regicide in the kingdom of Judah was accomplished, for two of his own servants slew the king in the bed where he lay sick. When Amaziah came to the throne his first act was to avenge the death of his father. In attempting to regain the province of Edom, Amaziah made great efforts and sacrifices. But the victory cost him too much, if we have regard to its moral consequences. Amaziah brought home the idols of the Edomites, and he

actually bowed down to those idols, though he had seen how powerless they were to help their creators and worshippers. Having changed his faith, the whole course of Amaziah was changed also. The end soon came on. The armies of Israel and Judah met at Beth-shemesh, where Amaziah was defeated, and whence he was brought back a prisoner to Jerusalem. Amaziah survived his defeat fifteen years, falling at last a victim to a conspiracy formed by his own subjects, being assassinated at Lachish, after a reign of nearly thirty years. The same fatality thus attended both the son and the father, Amaziah and Joash. Their morning was bright and full of promise, but apostasy set in; the prophet's remonstrances were rejected and contemned, and conspiracy was left to work out its evil purpose.

No sooner was Amaziah murdered than the people arose enthusiastically on behalf of his son: "All the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king." Uzziah, called also Azariah, reigned fifty-two years, the longest reign except Manasseh's, and the most successful except Jehoshaphat's since the disruption. Uzziah was trained under Zechariah, a prophet not to be mistaken for the priest of the same name who was martyred in the reign of Joash. "He sought God in the days of Zechariah . . . and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper." A very beautiful picture of the prosperity which attended the reign of Uzziah is given in the second chapter of Isaiah: "their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots." At home and abroad Uzziah was equally successful. Again, however, we come upon the melancholy fact that success turned the head of the king. In the hour of his pride he intruded into the priest's office; he offered incense, and repeated the transgression of Korah and his company. To the splendours of royalty he sought to add the dignities of priesthood. Suddenly, like lightning

from heaven, Uzziah was struck with leprosy, the burning spot showing itself in his forehead. For ever he was shut out from the temple, dwelling in a house of liberation, and when he was buried it was not in the sepulchres of the kings, but in a common ground of sepulture. The reign of Uzziah was marked by many calamities, as well as by many successes. In his reign there was a plague of locusts, and in his reign there was an earthquake, so severe that it was known as pre-eminently *the* earthquake. We are told that this earthquake formed a sort of chronological era by which time was reckoned. Thus Amos speaks of his prophetic call as two years before the earthquake; while allusions to its shocks and their consequences, the huge clefts, the upheavals, the undulations, the sea bursting its barriers, tinge deeply the prophetic language of that day. Even three centuries afterwards the prophet of the captivity refers to that same earthquake, and the terror which it inspired, in the following terms:—"Yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah." Jotham was Uzziah's successor. He reigned six years as regent, and sixteen years as king. Jotham "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did." Jotham built the high gate of the temple, and so protected it against attack on the north side; he strengthened Moriah in the south; and in the whole country of Judah he built cities, and in the forests he erected castles as places of fortification. To Jotham succeeded Ahaz, who came to the throne when he was twenty years old, and reigned sixteen years. To Ahaz belongs the unhappy pre-eminence of being the worst of all the kings that had reigned in Judah. Day by day he went from bad to worse; at the end apostatising absolutely from the national religion, cutting off the borders of the stands on which the lavers rested, removing the brazen sea from the oxen, altering or removing the royal covert, and destroying the vessels of the sanctuary; finally shutting up the temple and abolishing its service.

Ahaz was finally reduced to the position of a vassal, and, was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the sepulchres of the kings.

Under Hezekiah, the pious son of an impious father, who came to the throne at the age of twenty-five, there was a revival of true religion. Hezekiah began by reopening the temple and repairing its doors, restoring the worship of Jehovah, and replacing the priests and Levites in their courses. The king being godly, the priests immediately purified themselves. The time occupied in cleansing the temple was sixteen days, eight days were required for the cleansing of the court up to the porch, and eight more were needed for the cleansing of the temple proper. It was soon proposed to celebrate the great Passover, a ceremony which was kept on a grand scale. Israel and Judah were alike invited to take part in its celebration. Some mocked the suggestion, Ephraim openly laughed it to scorn; yet divers of Asher and Manasseh and Zebulun, and many even from Ephraim and Issachar, came to observe the sacred feast. The usual time assigned to the celebration of the Passover was seven days, but such was the enthusiasm of the people that it was continued for fourteen days, the second seven days being voluntary, and the king and the princes supplied the people with victims for sacrifices. Hezekiah had no sympathy with idolatry; he made it known that his determination was to root it out of his dominions. He brake in pieces the brazen serpent which Moses lifted up in the wilderness, and stigmatised it as "a mere piece of brass." After destruction came reconstruction; the courses of the priests and Levites were reappointed; order was given for their proper payment out of the tithes and firstfruits, and he himself set an example of liberality by large contributions for the sacrificial service. An illness of an inflammatory nature befell Hezekiah and brought him to the very door of death; but his life was miraculously prolonged fifteen years in answer to prayer. Soon after his recovery, Hezekiah received congratulatory

letters from the king of Babylon, a congratulation which had a disastrous end, so far as Judah was concerned ; the Babylonians were not moved by sympathy only, but by an ulterior purpose. He gave hospitable reception to the representatives of Merodach-Baladan, and displayed all his treasures to them,—an exhibition of vanity which called forth the severest rebuke of the prophet, who told him that all these treasures would be carried as spoil to Babylon, and that his sons would have to serve in the palace of the Babylonian king. Hezekiah died in the twenty-ninth year of his reign. Then came Manasseh, and Josiah, and Shallum, and others of inferior name, the incidents of whose reigns will be remarked upon in their proper places.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, may we know that everything is settled in heaven. May we be delivered from the folly of thinking that we can do anything permanently against God. Thou hast given us liberty, but it is with bounds. Thou dost set a watch over us. Thou hast said unto the sea, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and so thou hast said to every soul of man. We boast of our liberty, but it is only liberty to obey. There is an appointed time to man on the earth. Thou dost fix the bounds of our habitation; thou dost command thy lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night thy song is with us. We cannot cause the sun to rise or to set, or the rain to fall, or the wind to blow: we cannot reach beyond the limit which thou hast assigned. Help us to accept this liberty as a sphere to work in, to suffer in, and a sphere in which to show the simplicity and beauteousness of obedience. Blessed are they who accept thy will, and work in harmony with thy law, and never attempt to invent any statutes for themselves, but wisely, lovingly, hopefully, read thy book, and embody the same in useful conduct. We will be mindful of thee in all the walk of our daily life. Every morning thou hast raised us from the death of sleep, every day thou hast accompanied us through the flying hours, and again hast thou set stars above our resting-place and appointed thine angels to keep sentinels over us in the time of darkness. Our table thou hast spread, thou hast set summer in the midst of winter, green flowers in the snow for us, yea thou hast not withheld from us any good thing. Thou hast told us what to do in the time when our consciousness of sin amounts to agony: thou hast charged the unrighteous man to forsake his thoughts, and to give himself by repentance and faith to the living God, and he will abundantly pardon. Thou hast set before us the way of salvation. It is no dream of ours. Oftentimes we recoil from it in moments of pride and self-sufficiency. But this is the way of the Lord, this is the decree of heaven, this is the way by which men may return to an abandoned position. Lord, now we know it we say: It is well, it is right, it is the necessity of law, and it is the necessity of love; God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. May each be enabled to say, I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Then shall our joy be full, our life shall be a patient waiting for life fuller still. O Christ of God, thou didst come that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly—wave upon wave of life; may we know our life to be a daily increasing quantity, a daily multiplying joy. The Lord hear us in the day of trouble, and make our tears precious. The Lord sanctify our pain, so that our distress may become a means of grace. The Lord guide us by his counsel, and afterwards receive us to glory. Amen.

1 Kings i.

USURPATION.

DAVID is "old and stricken in years." Round about him there are certain proceedings which are almost always associated with the death of great men. There are persons who are wondering who will succeed to the throne. One man has made up his mind that he will be the king. Could we understand all that is going on in the minds of our friends when we ourselves are approaching the hour and article of death, we should be surprised by some revelations of character which we had little suspected. Even now, when there is no sign of immediate dissolution upon us, there are some who are appropriating what possessions we may have to bequeath: they have already laid out our estate in new figures; they have in imagination sold part of it, and given a new direction to many things which we thought permanently established; and they have sometimes ventured to forecast the time, or thereabouts, when we may die. Not a word of this do they say to us: they wish us well; they desire for us on each birthday "Many happy returns." Oh! but human nature is a puzzle, a problem, a mystery all darkness. Sometimes we think it is better to have nothing to leave; then there will be more honesty in our contemporaries. Expectation of property seems to destroy real affection. But it is singular altogether, so mixed and involved and unworkable. The Lord grant us sincerity all round, that we may speak to one another more frankly, and truthfully, and so make human intercourse into a Christian sacrament.

Adonijah said, "I will be king" (v. 5). How certainly, then, he will not! "Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself." He did not hear the voice sounding far away in the coming time which said, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased" always; by a sweet necessity. May we hearken unto this doctrine, and pray God to incline our hearts to keep the law which it represents. Adonijah was the fourth son of David born in Hebron, but probably he had become the eldest son by the death of his three senior brothers. Even then there was a charm about primogeniture, as there is about many long words.

Adonijah said: I am the eldest, therefore I ought to be the richest; Solomon is comparatively young: surely he ought not to stand in the way; I will be king. Did he spring into this self-conceit all at once, or is there a story behind it explaining this development of mischief? Certainly; there always is such a story if we could find it out. You will find that Adonijah was a spoiled child, for "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" (v. 6). That is the explanation. Every will has to be broken, and it ought to be broken as soon as possible; it is not as if the will could go on always having its own way, marching from conquering to conquer, going on from throne to throne; it is the law of life, and it is the most solemn fact in personal history, that the will must be broken, in the sense of being subdued, chastened, made to feel that there are other wills in creation, and that peace can only come by mutual understanding and concession. How cruel, then, are parents! They think they are kind, but their kindness is the worst form of cruelty. How would it be in physical matters? You say that a man's hand is out of action, and the doctor says that hand might have been as good as the other if the infirmity or accident had been attended to when the child was young. That we call reason. A child does not see straightly; its eye is somewhat askance; and the doctor again says that eye could have been made perfectly right if it had been attended to when the child was young. When the doctor says that, everybody looks upon him as a wise man. So many things ought to have been done when we were young! Yet we ourselves will not do them to those who are young, and who depend upon us for discipline, education, and general training. When the preacher says, this will, so urgent, so self-regarding, so selfish, might have been made better if the child had been taken in hand in time, the preacher is thought to be a sentimentalist. The doctor was right about the hand, and most learned about the eye; but when the preacher says the same thing about the will he is smiled upon as a man who has certain nostrums by which he thinks the world can be cured; and he knows of course how everybody's children ought to be trained; and generally he is a kind of decent and well-meaning gentleman who ought to be borne with. It is in vain that he points to history. It goes for nothing that he says, You are

killing your children. David seems to have been the murderer of all his children: a great public man, but of no use at home; one of those men who could fight a battle, but never broke the will of his own children; a great man on the public rostrum; doing good upon a great scale, but neglecting the details of domestic life. Adonijah, whose will had never been broken, said, "I will be king." What more natural? This is the fruit of the tree which David planted. We wonder that the harvest should not be of a different quality from the seed that was sown! Be not deceived; nature is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. The logic sometimes takes abrupt and terrible forms, but it is logic still. Our surprise is either a display of ignorance or a display of affectation. We can tell perfectly well what the child will turn out. We know precisely whether we are on the right-hand of God or on the left. These revelations are not matters of futurity: they are in the essence of things which are now ruling us and directing our course. When Adonijah said, "I will be king," he carried to its logical issue the training which he had received, or lacked, at home.

How will he set about this business? Exactly like a spoiled child. There is a striking consistency in all the parts of his character and action. If you ask for his programme, you may yourself write it for him; there is no need to make inquiry as to what he will do. Spoiled children can only do one thing. They are absolutely destitute of originality. What, then, does Adonijah do? Just what Absalom did. He copied Absalom whom in some degree he resembled, being also "a very goodly man." That is to say, a well-favoured man physically; good to look upon, a handsome, noble figure. What will Adonijah do? The answer is in the fifth verse:—"He prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him." What a spoiled baby must do! It looked so pleasing, so striking; the popular imagination would instantly take fire when such a display of chariots and horses and forerunners was discovered. But the popular imagination is a more solid thing than it is often accounted to be. We shall see that presently. Adonijah thought that if he put on his best things he would be king by virtue of his garments. He thought that fine binding makes fine books. He

supposed that noble houses make noble tenants. The abiding sophism: the continual mistake! Yet this was precisely in the line of his training. What have not spoiled children at home? what wooden horses, and banners, and drums, and toys of every kind! and they have only to cry long enough in order to multiply what they have got by ten. They need not resort to reason: it is enough that they resort to tears.

How will Adonijah proceed? quite consistently. In the seventh verse we find him still pursuing the same level of thought and purpose:—"And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest." What was Abiathar the priest? the priest of the tent in which the ark of God was kept? or was he but some subordinate, good and honest in his own way, but a little tempted to believe in chariots and horses and forerunners and outriders? Alas! it is possible for a priest even to be so demented. This was the bound of Adonijah's counsel: the crafty Joab and Abiathar. Not the people. Not a word was said to the people. The people were to be taken by a storm of music. That was Adonijah's great plan for taking the nation! Slay sheep and oxen, create a great festival: at a given moment sound the trumpet, make a display, and let the people come in under such glittering circumstances. But the people are wiser than they are often thought to be. Have faith in the people. You cannot easily measure them. Taken one by one, they do not seem to amount to much; but when they touch one another, and feel the contagion of sympathy and the inspiration of common interests; when they listen as one man to the voice of the declaimer or the charmer, the reasoner and the statesman, they know who is right and who is wrong. We shall see the lamentable position of Adonijah better when we ask concerning the absences which mark his limited counsel. We have seen who was there: now ask who was absent. The eighth verse is a melancholy answer:—"But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei [probably brothers of David] and the mighty men which belonged to David were not with Adonijah." "Nathan the prophet,"—we read in the tenth verse—"and Benaiah, and the mighty men, and Solomon his brother, he called not." The absence was not

fortuitous, but calculated. There are some men whom we cannot invite to certain counsels of our life. And our wish is to be estimated quite as much by the men who are not there as by the men who are present. Conceive the possibility of entering into some scheme or venture that is not wholly of the nature of daylight, that has in it flaws, breaks, bruises; and you dare not ask your wife to hear the plan before you put it into action; you dare not ask your most honest friend to review the case for you before you proceed any further. You make a noise in your head, you slay sheep and oxen, and blow trumpets, and get up a great excitement, hoping that the thing will turn out a success, and then you may invite your friends to look upon it, and praise you for a long-headed man. There are some conversations at which we dare not allow children to be present: suspect them—close them! Sometimes a straightforward honest soul is as terrible to us as God Almighty. If he only had kept out of the way, we might have perfected our plan and realised the satisfaction of perdition. But the honest man spoiled everything! he came in at the wrong moment. He came in blithely as the morning; his voice was pure music; there was the resonance of a soldier's heartiness in every tone. But he knew not that his very voice was a judgment upon our hidden iniquity. Suspect any plan to which you cannot invite Nathan and Zadok and Solomon, taking these names typically. We do not always want the minister to be present. We have many laymen's parties. The minister, poor soul, would spoil this game! so we have a side-room in which we will go through it, and when all is over we will come in and look upon the minister as if nothing out of the common had occurred. We will leave the minister: we will withdraw: it is a bad scheme you are up to if he cannot join it. If he is a man at all, a truly human soul, he will join any game that will bear investigation. The very fact that you dare not have him present is a sign that you are going to snatch thievishly at a crown or throne or joy which does not belong to you.

Why these signs of masonry? Why this desire to get away from the society of pure women and frank children, question-asking youth, and unsuspecting love? Why did you not

call Zadok and Nathan and Solomon? Out of thine own mouth I condemn thee. The honest man would have said, Let all come; this thing shall not be done in a corner; it is right, sound, clear-hearted, through and through,—come one, come all, and guide me if I am wrong. The right man need not be in any hurry. He will be sent for in due time. Solomon need not discompose himself; the prophet will see after him—that marvellous man who has a prophetic instinct, who reads the reality of things, who knows God's purpose and works out God's harmonies. "He that believeth shall not make haste." When the right man came, "all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes and rejoiced with great joy," so that the earth, as if a sympathetic listener, vibrated, and was rent with the sound of a festival. If nature will take no part with us, it is a poor coronation. If every little flower on the wayside does not as it were leap as we pass by, saying in its allegorical manner, God bless you: go on to your feast, for the victuals are honestly bought; if every star that twinkles does not send us a message of light amounting to a benediction, then depend upon it we are upon a wrong road, and we are forcing ourselves to a wrong issue. All the people came up after Solomon. Then Solomon must be king sooner or later; the other man must go down, whoever he is, however many chariots and horses and outrunners he has. There is a popular instinct. But was not the popular instinct wrong in the case of Christ when it cried out Crucify him! Crucify him!"? No; certainly not. Nor need we be surprised. The idea which prevailed in the popular mind was that Christ was going to be what he was not going to be; the purpose of Christ was not seized; a totally false conception had got abroad concerning him, for want of instruction and illumination. The popular instinct with regard to Christ is pledged. When the angel of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the great deep, then all men shall call him their desire, and he shall be fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; because then he will be understood: his kingdom will be seen to be not of this world; he is no small king, no petty monarch; he rules in the spirit, he rules over the heart, he conquers the will, he reigns over all the forgiven life: so spread the knowledge of his name; show how this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them, and that he is a

shepherd seeking the lost; and when that idea is really perceived and grasped there will come out of this great popular heart a grand acclaim, a burst of thankfulness, a shout which will rend the earth and make the heavens vibrate. The seer beheld the day in which all this took place. A prophet heard a voice as of many waters—a great multitude without number. Judge the popular instinct by that revelation, and not by some intermediate and mistaken phases of passing events.

What became of Adonijah? He "feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar"—the projecting pieces of wood overlaid with gold, to which the sacrifices were fastened with bands or ropes. Laying hold of these, he thought he had the right of asylum; and he feared Solomon, "saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to-day that he will not slay his servant with the sword" (vv. 50, 51). "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." Adonijah, who began by saying, "I will be king," ended by saying, I am a servant. See the end of all vanity, foolish conceit, mistaken and selfish ambition; so Solomon, being a king in very deed, said: He shall have a conditional pardon—"If he will shew himself a worthy man, there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth: but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die" (vv. 52). So Adonijah became a ticket-of-leave man. What a fame! but right. Do not let us mistake this: for we are all ticket-of-leave men. Let there be no boasting. We are all out of hell conditionally. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." We have no respectability. Our supposed respectability is a millstone round about our neck. Hear the word of the living God, and mistake not the exact position which every man occupies. He is spared on probation, he is watched; if he live as he ought to live, by the grace of God he will be saved; if he serve himself, if he live the earthly life, if he deny the Lord that bought him, if he endeavour to find some way of living without God, he will be lost. Do not let us boast as if we were free men. We are only temporarily free; we are living by permission; our breath is in our nostrils. Hear the word of the Lord: there is but a step between thee and death!

1 Kings ii.

DAVID IN VIEW OF DEATH.

THE setting of David's sun was a gradual process, as is shown by the words, "Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die" (v. 1). A very pathetic utterance is found in the second verse, namely, "I go the way of all the earth." We cannot but stop here, and stand in amazement at the fact that a stronger king than David had arisen to claim his own. Could no exception be made in the case of the illustrious monarch of Israel, the sweetest of singers, the most beautiful of persons, the most valiant of soldiers? From his earliest days he had been a favourite and a hero, and has it come to this, that at the last he must simply take his place in the great world-crowd, and go down to the common grave? God is no respecter of persons. It is consolatory in another aspect, to know that the law is universal, that the rich and the poor alike succumb to the tyrannical sway, and that at the last we shall all be found in a great multitude which no man can number. Whilst we dwell upon special privileges and notable exaltations, upon all the side of life which we consider to be marked by sunshine and good fortune, we are struck, sometimes unhappily, by the startling contrasts which are disclosed: it is, therefore, a healthful exercise of the mind sometimes to look upon the great common aspects of humanity, and to see how all distinctions are merged and all differences forgotten in universal calamities or universal blessings. For a long time David has been standing, as it were, on a pinnacle, quite solitary in his grandeur and altogether unapproachable in majesty and fame; but at this moment he descends from his lofty pedestal and takes rank with the poorest and meanest of his subjects. Let us learn that all earthly distinctions are temporary, and that many exaltations only show their corresponding abasements the more conspicuously. King and subject can have

but one way in preparing to meet the great enemy. That way is to be reconciled to God, to receive the divine purpose as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, and then to await the final stroke with equanimity and hopefulness.

Although the king is about to take his journey into a far country from which there is no return, he yet takes an interest in the future of Israel and the immediate responsibilities of his own house. His words to Solomon are the words of a soldier and a patriot:—"Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man: and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself" (vv. 2, 3). There is no sign of death in this high moral energy. We can hardly imagine the voice of the speaker to have fallen into a whisper: it seems rather to resound with the force and clearness of a trumpet tone. We have before been surprised at the energy which David displayed even in his closing hours; as, for example, when he was told that Adonijah had usurped the throne (see 1 Kings i. 28 and following verses). Now there is no wrath in the king's tone, but a sense of duty makes it strong. What can be more pitiful than for a man to suppose that when he is dying all the operations of the world are about to cease? and what can be sublimer than to behold a veteran resigning himself to his last fate, and yet handing on the torch of truth and empire, which he has so long grasped, to another and younger man. David exhorts Solomon to be strong. Every man is to work as though everything depended upon himself. This call to strength runs through the whole of Scriptural exhortation: "Arise, put on thy strength." "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "Strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power." A noble motto this—"Show thyself a man." Is it possible for a man to do otherwise? All human history returns an answer which cannot be mistaken. The man is not in the gender but in the character. By a "man" David means king, hero, prince; a soul thoroughly self-controlled,

fearless, above all bribery and corruption, and vitally identified with the enduring interests of the people. The great lack of the Church is a lack of courage. Its theology is sound, its manners are unimpeachable, its propriety is exemplary, but it is overborne by the enemy in a thousand instances, simply because of lack of moral courage. If the Church would speak out and act out its convictions, the age of persecution would soon return; the age of persecution is kept back because there is nothing to persecute.

It must be observed that the charge delivered to Solomon by his father was intensely religious in its spirit. Not only was Solomon introduced to a throne, but the book of the law was placed in his hands, and he was simply to peruse it, understand it, and apply it. Nothing was to be invented by the king himself. "It shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them" (Deut. xvii. 18, 19). There was, then, nothing for the king to invent. He begins his monarchical life with the whole law clearly written out before him. This is the advantage with which we begin our life,—namely, that we have nothing to write, invent, suggest, or test by way of perilous experiment; we have simply to consult the holy oracles, to make them the man of our counsel, and to do nothing whatever which is not confirmed by their spirit. To do this simply means that we are to be Bible students, knowing the word of God thoroughly, perfectly instructed in its terms and in its purpose, and paying no attention to any voice, how charmful soever, that would lure us from daily consultation and continual obedience. Where, then, is originality? We must find the originality in our personal faithfulness. It will be originality enough for God if he can find us acting consistently with the knowledge we already possess, and embodying it in new and sacrificial incarnations. It is a mistake to suppose that originality is merely an intellectual trick, or an exercise in vocal legerdemain; there is always room enough for the true originality in the

education of conduct and the taking-up of responsibilities in relation to the ignorant, the poor, and the oppressed.

Now we come to official words. From this point so terrible is the charge which David delivers to Solomon that we must impress ourselves with the fact that the charge is *official* rather than personal. It must be remembered that David was king, and that as king he had certain public duties to perform, and that in the utterance of his judgments and sentences he is not expressing personal vindictiveness, but is in reality magnifying the law. A remembrance of this fact will relieve the mind from very grievous anxiety as to the spirit of David. The words have too often been read as a threat, and have been made vivid by imparting to them a tone of malice, as though the king would say—Now my hand shall be upon mine enemies, when it is impossible for them to repay me in any way, because I am about to vanish from their sight and touch. The kingliness of law is above the kingliness of mere personality. To trifle with law is to trifle with everything which relates to the security and consolidation of society. Our own judges pronounce sentences quite as severe as those which are found in this valedictory speech. We must therefore imagine David seated upon the throne of judgment and delivering sentences as the messenger of God; this will save his speech from the charge of vindictiveness and cruelty. If we could have heard the tone in which the sentences were delivered, we should have better been able to explain the purport of the words. We may pervert the Scripture by reading it in a false tone. Let us pray that not only may we give the exact word of Scripture, but utter it so far as is possible in the very music of the divine voice. It should be noticed also, in connection with these judgments and sentences, that in every case a reason was assigned. That is a vital point. Take for example the case of Joab. David recalls "what the son of Zeruiah did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet" (v. 5). Here is the ground of judgment. Regarding it seriously, who can doubt that it afforded a sufficient

basis for the sentence which David pronounced? Joab was a man who delighted in blood; for he shed it not in battle only but in the day of peace; nor did he regard bloodshed as a dire necessity, but he actually sprinkled blood upon his girdle and on his shoes, and seemed to delight in the marks of a bloodthirsty man. Then again in the case of Absalom, David could not forget that Joab "took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak." So we are not called upon to pity a man who was sentenced to a death he did not deserve; we are rather called upon to observe the inevitable issue of conduct and law. For a long time they may seem to have no relation to one another, but there comes a point when the terrific collision takes place, and at that point it is always law whose supremacy is vindicated. If Joab had gone down to his grave in peace, a great public scandal would have been created. We have again to remind ourselves that something is due to dead men as well as to living persons; the memory of the down-trodden has to be honoured, and sometimes that can only be effected by the open disgrace or public execution of the men who oppressed them. "A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them."

Looking at Joab's conduct to David, to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, and to Abner, and to Amasa, and unto Absalom, we cannot but feel that the proportion between the guilt and the doom is measured by righteousness. That David was not carried away by indiscriminate retaliation is proved by the change of tone which he adopts when he comes to speak of the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite: "Let them be of those that eat at thy table": in this case also a reason is assigned for the judgment:—"for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother." Instances of this kind show how clear was the mental vision of the king even in the near approach of death. Nothing was forgotten. Judgment was meted out with discernment. The old days were lived over again in the king's recollection, and in the midst of their tumult he saw how Barzillai the Gileadite "brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter,

and sheep, and cheese of kine," and how the old man "went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan." It certainly does something towards mitigating the severity of David's judgment upon Joab to show how careful he was to recognise the kindness of those who had served the royal cause, for in that instance not only was the cause royal, it was also divine; the throne of Israel had become as the throne of God. Now David changes his tone once more, and makes reference to "Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim" (v. 8).

Everything about that instance also is most clearly remembered. David does not forget that when Shimei came down to meet him at Jordan, he sware unto the Lord, saying that Shimei should not be put to death with the sword. In Israel all pardon ceased with the death of the king, and it was for his successor to say whether this pardon should be renewed, or whether judgment should take effect. David seems to refer to this law when concerning Joab he said to Solomon—"Do therefore according to thy wisdom" (v. 6). These words would seem to open a door of possible escape. But Joab proved himself unworthy of any protection, and brought his death upon his head with his own hand. So in the case of Shimei, David said to Solomon, "Thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him," so the judgment was not to be an act of violence or mere triumph of might over weakness; it was to be marked by that terrible calmness which adds to judgment its most awful elements of impressiveness. David was now giving judgment according to the age in which he lived: it was not a highly civilised age: the law had only reached a certain point of development: David, therefore, must not be held responsible for the law under which we ourselves live. David's Lord said—"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."

"So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (v. 10). He died as it were in the act of pro-

nouncing judgment, and himself went to be judged by the eternal king. How near is that bar to every one of us; the final word is not spoken by man; he can but give judgment according to his light, or to his immediate understanding of the circumstances which appeal to him; there is one Judge who will rectify all our decisions and readjust everything which we have thrown into disorder. Let the judge remember that he himself is to be judged, and let the king ponder the solemn thought that he is the subject of a higher King. Then comes the inevitable record of figures. The eleventh verse is drearily arithmetical—"And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem." This is a kind of epitaph; but how innumerable are the lines which it encloses, how terrible the energy which it represents by mere points of time; our whole course admits of being stated in two lines,—namely, the day of our birth, and the day of our death, but as to what takes place between these two points, only God can know in all the fulness of its detail and meaning. We know next to nothing of our dearest friends; where they were born, how long they lived, and all the facts of their outer life, we know well; but as to their thoughts, dreams, purposes, intentions: their wordless reasonings, their unuttered prayers, the murders, fornications, adulteries which they committed in the heart, and the tears of the soul which were shed over purposes so malignant,—all these are wrapped up in mystery which it is impossible for the human mind to penetrate. Whilst we dread the thought of the divine judgment, let us also turn it into a means of grace and a centre of hope: forasmuch as God knows our frame, he remembers that we are dust, and he will judge—not according to the coarse criticism of those who see only the exterior, but with the infinite wisdom which measures motive and strength and opportunity and supreme purpose. Let us praise God, therefore, with a loud voice and a most grateful heart, because he is the judge of the whole earth and from his sentence there is no appeal.

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with the sayings and doings of Solomon himself. "Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was established greatly."

Quickly does he begin the execution of judgment, so that by the end of the chapter it would seem as if the enemies of David and the enemies of heaven were being quickly swept off the face of the earth. The first instance is that of Adonijah the son of Haggith, who came to Bath-sheba the mother of Solomon, desiring that she would speak to Solomon the king that he would give him Abishag the Shunammite to be his wife. Bath-sheba, suspecting nothing, presented the petition to the king, but king Solomon, seeing the whole mean request, instantly determined upon the slaughter of Adonijah. To ask for the late king's concubine was in reality to commit an act of high-treason. Solomon read, therefore, not the merely personal wish, but the hidden purpose of the former usurper, and by the hand of the chief of the body guard he brought Adonijah to his fate. There is something mournfully pathetic about Solomon's treatment of Abiathar the priest. We have just seen that Abiathar was one with whom Adonijah took counsel at the time of his usurpation. Solomon remembered that he was a priest, and that he bare the ark of the Lord God before David, and therefore he restrained himself, and would not at that time slay the priest. A singular sanctity seems at all times to have surrounded priestly men. Had Abiathar been a soldier, Solomon would have slain him instantly. But how can they be wholly bad who have borne the ark of the Lord God and have openly prayed for other men? It is hard to believe that any man who has been privileged to intercede with heaven on behalf of others should himself be rotten at the core. Abiathar had undoubtedly identified himself with the cause of David at one period of his life, and David had reposed confidence in the priest, saying, "Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with me thou shalt be in safe guard." But Abiathar was thrust out from being priest unto the Lord. Can any picture be more humiliating! There is no fall equal to that. To be driven out of the Christian pulpit, to be banished from the table of the Lord, to be exiled from the sanctuary which has been a home,—is there aught in hell so intolerable? What applies to public officers applies with equal pertinence to those who have enjoyed the security and privileges of Church life. Only man can expel himself from the Christian sanctuary. Official excommunication amounts to nothing; the

obliteration of the name from the parchment-roll of the Church is not worthy of a moment's consideration; all such excision may under some circumstances be more a compliment than a condemnation; the question is whether a man has dispossessed himself of membership in the true Church, has put the knife to his own throat as it were, and taken away his spiritual life. See Abiathar driven away from the altar, conscience-stricken, self-accusing, unable to lift up his head to heaven, or to invoke the smile of man or of God; and in that humiliating picture see a faint emblem of those unworthy ones who at last shall "go away into everlasting punishment."

Now comes the case of Joab. In very deed a hard case for Solomon to deal with; for Joab's had been a mixed life, not altogether destitute of elements which might have claimed high consideration from the house of David; but the very fact that there were such points in that life only shows how complete and independent was the judgment which Solomon was about to pronounce. Had there been no points of alleviation, Solomon's course would have been easy in the matter: or had the case been one of mere sentimentalism, Solomon might have dwelt upon those points and forgotten the supreme wickedness of the man: but Joab's very valour and constancy up to a given point in the cause of David can only be used to show that there is a judgment which does not look at sentimental features and characteristics, but that fixes its attention upon the essential character of the evil-doer. Joab took refuge in the tabernacle and "caught hold on the horns of the altar." There he seemed to suppose he had right of asylum, but he forgot that the law provided that even in some cases the altar itself did not save a man from the deserts of his wicked deeds. "If a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die." Did not Joab slay many men "with guile"? He took Abner "aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died." "Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died." In vain, therefore, that such a man sought to turn the altar into

an asylum. When Solomon heard that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, he commanded the chief of the body guard to fall upon him. "So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness" (v. 34). There are times when mercy seems to be rightly turned into judgment. "Thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with thee." This was not murder; it was the assertion and vindication of righteousness. "So shalt thou put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord." The Lord undertakes to look after innocent blood, and to see that the men who shed it pay dearly for the gratification of their passion. Manasseh "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood," and "the Lord would not pardon." Thus we see how law follows transgression, and how penalty waits to do the will of God. The blood of the seventy sons of Jerubbaal was "laid upon Abimelech their brother, which slew them; and upon the men of Shechem, which aided him in the killing of his brethren;" and so the blood of the two men "more righteous and better than he," to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, returned upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever; and Shimei came to his rightful fate. He was told to keep within the bounds of Jerusalem under pain of suffering death if he committed trespass. Shimei went beyond the bounds that he might bring his servants back from Gath; then the king arose and said to Shimei, "Thou knowest all the wickedness which thine heart is privy to, that thou didst to David my father: therefore the Lord shall return thy wickedness upon thine own head;" and the executioner went out and fell upon Shimei that he died. "As I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, even it will I recompense upon his own head." "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness."

But who is to fill the place of Abiathar the priest? We remember that Adonijah did not consult with Zadok the priest when organising his usurpation. Zadok was faithful to the royal

cause, and it was he whom the king did put in the room of Abiathar (v. 35). God will find successors to all vacant offices. Joab and Abiathar must not imagine that the State or the Church will go down when their energy and sagacity are removed from its policy and counsel. The Lord's cause can receive no patronage from bad men. Whatever happens, they must be cast out; and God will raise up a seed unto himself, and a generation to serve him, rather than accept the corrupt ministry of men who have trodden his law under foot and done despite to the spirit of his covenant. "I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine anointed for ever." Thus the priest is a divine creation, and the divine energy never faileth. Of God it is said, "He fainteth not, neither is weary." What a chapter is this for the vacancies which it creates in history; David dies, the mighty Joab is overwhelmed and removed, Adonijah descends to his grave, Abiathar is cast out, and Shimei is destroyed; yet the throne of Israel remains, the altar of God stands intact, and the great purpose of providence passes serenely and majestically through all the tumult of human history. Always look for the permanent quantity in the details of unrest and rebellion with which history abounds. It would be an imperfect and unsettling view which took note of the tumult only, and did not see under all the upheaval and reshaping of things the hand that works night and day for the readjustment of proportions and the distribution of rewards and penalties to men according to the spirit of their conduct. An awful chapter: a chapter full of blood and terrible judgment: a great cry of weakness and of sin, a horrible pageant of darkness relieved with lurid flames; yet amidst all these commotions, and rendings of apparently permanent relations the throne of God stands sure, and the majesty of heaven rules over all.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou dost always know who will betray thee. Surely this is part of the grief of heaven. Thou readest the heart through and through; thou knowest all its secret motives and hidden springs, and the way thereof is not concealed from thine eyes. There is not a thought in our hearts, there is not a word on our tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou seest the fair morning, and knowest how stormy it will be at eventide; thou beholdest the fresh young spring, and thou canst foresee the harvest is a heap and a day of desperate sorrow. We cannot tell what we shall yet do. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Hold thou me up; and I shall be safe. Have us in thy holy keeping; especially those who would sometimes keep themselves, because of consciousness of unusual strength. When we are strong, then are we weak; when we are weak, then are we strong. Lord, we believe: help thou our unbelief. We grieve thee every day; yet thou dost not cut us down with a stroke; even when we defy thee thou dost restrain thy thunder. Thy mercy endureth for ever. The goodness of the Lord is from generation to generation, abiding; yea, surely, growing. We run to the cross; we trust to thy mercy; we look up to Jesus Christ thy Son our Priest and Saviour. His blood cleanseth from all sin. Help us to believe this—not that we may sin the more, but sin not at all. The Lord help us in all the way of life, to carry its burdens, to interpret its sorrows aright, to shed its tears without scepticism or upbraiding of providence; and when the end comes, may we find it is no end, but the beginning—the opening of brighter worlds. Amen.

1 Kings iii. 3.

"And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father; only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places."

SOLOMON'S CHARACTER.

WHICH of these elements will conquer at the last? The sentence is divided into two parts. There is only a semicolon between the one part and the other, so far as its typographical relation is concerned; but the two parts are wide asunder morally as far as the east is from the west. In which part of the sentence will Solomon die? This is a question which

concerns every man; for the same sentence may be employed in describing the character of most of those who have in their hearts some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel. Sometimes we go up as on wings of eagles. We run, and are not weary; we walk, and are not faint. God seems to have given us great strength, and riches ample and ever-enduring, so that the heart has no fear and the spirit is unrestrained in prayer. Sometimes we go down into the place of night, the very quarters of darkness, the very depths of gloom, where winter is born, where sorrow sheds its tears, where iniquity comes with its broken petition, its half-selfish prayer for forgiveness. In which of these conditions shall we finish life? That is the question we put concerning Solomon, and it is the inquiry we should put concerning ourselves. Is this the morning twilight that grows into the perfect day: or is it the evening twilight that deepens into uttermost darkness?

See how well Solomon begins. The very goodness of the beginning alarms us. That is a sad thing to say, but considering life in all its breadth and tragedy, it seems a not unnatural statement to make. How many fair mornings have died in tumultuous sunsets! How many who began well have fallen out of the way, and are not found at the last when the winners are counted one by one. And how many who began badly come in late and say, Father, we have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and are no more worthy to be called by any name of endearment or to have any place of honour! Yet no doctrine can be founded upon either of these facts. They are simply to be taken as phenomena, full of sharp suggestion and profound moral teaching. See how well Solomon begins. When he went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, he slew a thousand beasts, and burned them upon the great high place. In Gibeon Solomon dreamed. When the Lord has his tenderest messages to deliver to us, does he not cause a deep sleep to fall upon us, that we may have excluded from our vision and imagination all things broad, vulgar, debasing, and misleading? When he would send the angel into the garden, will he not send her through the gate of sleep? God uses the dream as no nightmare, but as a moral medium, a highway into the soul's best thought. We shall see Solomon at his highest when we find him in a sleep into which he has been

put by the power of God. In answer to the divine inquiry propounded in the dream, Solomon gives an outline of his own character and policy; and looking at this answer, we ask again, Did Solomon begin well? And beginning well, will he finish well? Hear him as he sleeps: he calls himself God's "servant"; he describes himself as "but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in."—(v. 7). Surely he will do well, a beginning like this must have a conclusion worthy of its simplicity and pureness. He is king, yet servant; he is king, but not God; he is king, but not master: he draws his lines definitely, he stands within his bounds in an attitude of attention awaiting heaven's will. What a sweet beginning! Who would not baptise him then, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, three Persons in one God? He is worthy to be king. Wisdom is always royal. Spiritual wisdom should always occupy the throne.

Now he prays:—

"Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad" (v. 9).

That is a distinction not easily realised. There is a good so good that no mistake can be made about it; there is a bad so bad that decency turns away from it, and uninstructed instinct revolts and cannot be persuaded to look at the ghastly spectacle. But the division is not always so sharp and vital, or so patent and easily determined. What is spiritual good? What is spiritual bad? What about that mysterious border-land where good and bad seem almost to inter-penetrate, to hold confidential communication, and to be making compromises, and to be learning each other's native tongue? What about the good motive, the noble impulse, the incitement pure as fire,—kindly as light? And what about the crooked motive, the tortuous policy, the unavowed selfishness, the cruelty which wears the gloves of kindliness and friendship, the double-mindedness that only omniscience can penetrate and judge? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Solomon would not be a king who made broad distinctions only; he would have the spirit of wisdom,—that is to say, the spirit of discernment, the spirit of discrimination, the spirit which could not be imposed upon; he would be to Israel, as David had been

described again and again, as "an angel of God." When hypocrites and dissemblers came before David, they said: "It is of no use to conceal the matter from the king; his eye sees the inner meaning, and dissimulation does but provoke the king's discernment to greater keenness and severity." Such a man must go up. Now we read "Solomon loved the Lord," and we know it to be true. We will say of him: Yes, he will ascend; he has clean hands, and will grow stronger and stronger; his light will grow more and more unto the perfect day; he will surely die at noontide, and his death will eclipse the gaiety of the skies. How well he begins when he comes into actual life; the deceiving woman comes before him, and claims a child, which in reality she has stolen. What is to be done? The king said: Bring me a sword and divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other. Was ever answer so charged with true wit, discernment, nature, pathos? Have the wits of the world improved this reply? Have they brought a keener edge to bear upon the difficulty? Here stands the answer: add one line of beauty to it, if you can; improve it in any particular, if such improvement lie within the scope of your power. Whence hath this man this wisdom? This answer was never born of mere sagacity. We know it to be inspired, because it covers the whole case, is true to human nature, and brings to witness instincts that cannot be crushed until human nature itself is extinguished. And there is none like him. Having asked wisdom, God says: Now I will give thee that which thou hast asked, "a wise and an understanding heart;" and more: "I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days" (v. 13). And there was none like him, for "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (iv. 29, 30). Never was a man so wise, so good, so rich, so great, as Solomon. Splendour is added to splendour, until the whole firmament burns with glory. Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman and Chalcol, and Darda, men of unusual wisdom and peculiar fame, were not to be named with Solomon: his genius gave language to the cedar, and

made the voice of the hyssop to be heard in song; as for his proverbs, they were an army for multitude, and his songs were a thousand and five. The king's throne was of ivory, and twelve lions stood upon its steps; and the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars were as abundant as sycamore trees. And so human nature seemed to be glorified in king Solomon! "There came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom" (iv. 34). Oh, would to God the gate of heaven would open for him *now*, and let him in! Would he might die as the last king leaves him, wonderstruck at his boundless wisdom; he would go up as the dew goes in the early morning when the sun calls it, to make rainbows of it and clouds in the blue sky. It has been also the same with ourselves. What man amongst us has not said?—*Now*, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. We do sometimes fix our own death-point. We seem to know when it would be best for us to die—when the heart is all prayer, when the soul is all love, when life breathes the fresh air of spiritual freedom:—*Now*, Lord! How well for some of us had we died in the cradle; we should then have begun life in heaven. From what great heights may men fall!

How will Solomon die? So far he has been in the first part of the text, loving God, walking in the statutes of David his father, a wise and understanding king, and as for his riches, God poured them upon him until they were without measure; and we have wished that under such circumstances he might die. Now take another picture about the same Solomon:—"When he was old . . . Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites"—(xi. 4, 5). When he was old: when he ought to have known better; when experience ought to have become a kind of religion; when something like complete knowledge of life ought to have made him more devout, reverent, loyal, and true. Call no man bad until he is dead; reserve the epitaph for the buried bones! Call no man lost until all the light is gone out of the wide kind heaven. The doctrine applies in both ways. We may perish within sight of land. Men are not drowned only in the great Atlantic; they are drowned within the ten feet into which they fall. We may be

within sight of home, and never reach it; we may see the fair city, its pinnacles flashing in the eternal light, and hear somewhat of the holy song of the high places of the universe; and at the last the enemy may win. Would God we had died in childhood! say we many a time, when the chase is severe, when the enemy has his hand immediately over us ready to strike. Let us talk not so. We cannot tell what is to be. Let us fall into the hands of the living God. Great gifts mean great dangers. The higher the exaltation the more terrible the fall, should it take place. Great zeal is but the religious aspect of great passion. The only thing we can do is to pray the living God that we may be kept body, soul, and spirit, that we may be beset behind, and before, and have the divine hand laid upon us; yea, that we may be kept in the hollow of the hand of love. To this great prayer—great in its simplicity and tenderness—the heart that best knows itself will be the first to say Amen! Sad that the buds and the blossoms do not always come to fruit, that the snow upon the summer ground is a snow of bud and blossom shaken off the tree of promise. How well some of us promised when we were boys; what predictions were made concerning us; we were to be pure, true, unselfish, noble, and tongue for the dumb, eyes for the blind, and our eloquence was to take fire whenever man was oppressed, whenever righteousness was outraged. Where are the predictions now? Better perhaps not inquire, for the man of whom they were uttered may be a drunkard, may be crouching where he ought to have stood erect, may be overwhelmed by floods which he himself let loose. On the other hand—for is it not better to hasten to the sunny side of the hill and there spend the day?—are not some by the grace of God better than they ever promised to be? Was it not said of some, They will come to no good; mischief is in their hearts, and they must come to evil? And have they not been turned into right paths and become burning and shining lights, apostles of truth, evangels of mercy? We have need of continual watchfulness. "What I say unto one," said Christ, "I say unto all, Watch." The point to be kept before the mind is that where there are two aspects of character, the question arises, which of them shall predominate at the last? Thus; here is a young man, and we speak of him in these terms: he is very good, kind, chivalrous, but he is fond of excitement.

How is that life to end? Will the chivalry triumph or the love of excitement? Will he go from home to be amused? When he plays his innocent games, will he be frowned out of the house by some foolish father, and driven to play those games within a stranger's gates? Will he want more excitement than he can have under rational restriction? Or again: this young man has many a charm; sometimes he is all that one could desire him to be—so courteous, considerate, and obliging; only he is a little self-sufficient; he never feels himself unequal to the occasion; he always stands to the front; *Nulli cedo* is his motto. What will become of him? We wonder. We do not reply. Or we say: this man is intelligent, companionable, right pleasant altogether, but "rather close." What do you mean by that? Rather pinching, penurious; rather covetous; he is not a miser, but he spends so much time in calculating what this or that will cost him. Which shall triumph? Where there is intelligence and covetousness be assured the covetousness will quench the lamp of intelligence, or only use it to explore regions in which covetousness can improve its own wealth. We have watched these features of character develop themselves in young lives; and it has been a pitiful spectacle to see the good go down and the bad go up, so that he who began life with being "rather close;" ended life as ungenerous and utterly selfish. A sad thing to see any young man "rather close!" We have no good opinion of him. Self-consideration, self-calculation, self-protection in a young soul seems like a plant out of its proper soil. Yet we dare not say too much lest others should take licence and become fools. The question is, which side of our character is to come uppermost at the last? What are we to be when we are old? See an old kind man, an old good man, an old chivalrous man,—why, these are contradictions in terms: "kind" is never old, "chivalry" is never decrepit, generosity is always young. Heaven, as we have said before, is eternal youthfulness. Let us take heed and beware and watch from the morning until the evening, and from the evening until the morning, for the enemy slumbers not: it is when men sleep that he sows tares. The living God help us!

PRAYER.

Almighty God, judgment is thy strange work: mercy is thy peculiar delight: God is love. Behold, thou hast set wide open a door into which the prodigal may enter. Thou dost wait to be gracious: thy longsuffering and thy tender mercy what imagination can conceive, or what tongue can adequately set forth? We need thee every day, at every moment of every day, for our hearts have gone astray from righteousness and our thoughts are far from heaven. We bless thee for sweet gospel truths, great messages of love,—the very music of God's own heart; these come to us from heavenly places, and breathe themselves into our heart's hearing when that heart is most self-despairing. We thank thee for a music not of earth—the music of pardon through the cross, of forgiveness through the blood of the lamb,—a mystery which is far beyond all other wonders, not to be known by men, or explained by them, but to be felt in all its graciousness and rest. We have done the things we ought not to have done, but thou canst magnify the law, thou canst be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly, who can tell the resources of thy grace? Who can lay a line upon the love of God and say, This is the measure thereof? Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Thou dost forgive our iniquities, thou dost restore our souls, thou dost bring back that which is lost, and there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over every penitent sinner. We thank thee for words of this kind—so high in quality, so tender in tone, so precious in all their suggestiveness. We hail them with welcome. This truly is the voice of God; this surely is the message of our Father. Give us to feel that where grace abounds our sin must not abound: because God is merciful, shall we go on to sin? God forbid! May we rather be ashamed of our sin, turn away from it, and flee away fast, lest the enemy should turn upon us and overtake our life. We bless thee for our conscience, the monitor within, the voice that speaks to us of law, righteousness, honour, and truth: this is as the presence of God in the soul; this is the very light of heaven; this is the counsel of eternity. May we cultivate our conscience; may it be pricking, sharp, full of rebuke and judgment; and thus may it also be gifted with the power of commending us and encouraging us in all the ways of virtue. Thou knowest how little we are, and poor, and altogether unworthy; we have lost our heritage, we have no more foothold in thy creation: we are fallen. We come to thee as such—as apostates, as criminals who might have loved and obeyed God, but have not done so. God be merciful unto us sinners: the Lord be very merciful unto us even to tenderness, for we cannot stand before thee when thou dost look upon us in the light of the law. O that we had hearkened

unto thy voice, and walked in the way of thy commandments: then had our righteousness flowed like a river or as the waves of the sea; but let the time past more than suffice, let God be gracious unto his servants and give them further opportunity. Amen.

1 Kings iv.

THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT.

IN David we have seen, vividly enough, a picture of the Church militant. When was David not at war? When was he not persecuted, followed hotly upon the mountains by vengeful rivals and hostile men of various names? Did he not live often in the rock and in the den and in the cave of the earth? Was he not often without shelter, without food, without friends? Verily no better type for the Church militant can be found in history, and it is questionable whether a more vivid representation of the militant Church could be conceived by human fancy. We have heard the clash of arms; we have watched the king fleeing away from his enemies; we have studied much of his policy, and acquainted ourselves familiarly with his temper and his purposes; and again we revert to David as fitly and strikingly typifying the militant Church. The Church of Christ has often been in precisely the same circumstances spiritually. Friendless, persecuted, hunted, hated, suffering all manner of distress and evil, driven away in the night-time, pitilessly pursued by enemies athirst for blood, the Church has had a weary life, a long struggle, a battle almost without pause night or day; the Church has suffered every variety of pain, indignity, humiliation, and loss. In proof of this read the eleventh chapter of Hebrews in the concluding verses, and there see what the Church has been and done in many a long age. Putting the two histories together, there can be no disagreement as to the statement that David represents the militant Church in all the variety of its anxious and distressing experience. Coming to Solomon, we come to one who typifies the Church triumphant. The figure must not be driven too severely; we must take its poetry and its suggestiveness rather than its literal narrative and course. Solomon did not begin life as David began it. Solomon was born to the purple: David was no king's son; he was the son of "thy servant Jesse the Beth-

lehemite." Jesse probably was not a great landed owner and prince, for David was asked with whom he had "left those few sheep in the wilderness." Which of the two began life under the better auspices? Is it better to be born a shepherd, or a prince? Solomon, however, was a king's son, and must take all the disadvantages of high birth. Who would be born high if he could help it? What restraint, what limitation of liberty, what fierce criticism, what unreasonable censure, what irrational and untenable expectations, all mark the position of a man who was born a prince. These are the disadvantages, and Solomon must encounter them. Wherein, then, does Solomon represent the Church triumphant even typically? surely he does so in the universality of his reign :—

"So king Solomon was king over all Israel."—(v. 1).

Make these words bear their very highest meaning, and we begin to approach a true conception of the position of Jesus Christ as he sits enthroned above the riches of the universe, ruling an obedient creation, receiving the acclaims of the nations he has redeemed. Even this is prophesied. The prophets were bold men. They followed their logic to its conclusions; yea, even until it became poetry, and surprised themselves with unexpected music. We must not regard millennial glory and millennial music as representing only imagination, fancy, a vivid or overwrought dreaming faculty; all that is brightest, sweetest, most melodious, expresses an underlying solidity of fact, history, reality. This is the meaning of prophecy,—namely, that seed shall come to harvest; that the one little ear shall die, and rot, and out of its very putrescence lift up a head sixty-fold in fruitfulness and gold-like in beauty. The prophets said, Right shall reign; the day must come when men will see that right is better than wrong, justice better than injustice, and peace to be preferred above battle; and all this will be wrought out in connection with the name of Immanuel—God with us,—whose name is the Prince of Peace: the government shall be upon his shoulder, and all men will wish it to remain there; and so they flung their words upon the ages, and all the centuries as they come and go are tending in the direction of establishing peace, brotherhood, love, unity, and sanctifying the whole by its cause —namely, the spirit and purpose of the Son of God.

So far, then, we feel no difficulty in this typology. Now observe the perfect appointments of Solomon's kingdom:—

"And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision. And these are their names."—(vv. 7, 8).

And then comes the honourable list. Even here we get some hint of the order which shall prevail in the Messianic kingdom: every man in his place, every man doing his simple duty, or discharging his complex responsibilities; willing to be a master, willing to reign with princes; willing to go on errands, willing to light a lamp, or willing to take the highest offices in the Church: all done in the spirit of order, because done in the spirit of obedience and love, and all expressing the new-born sense of moral harmony and acquiescence in the eternal fitness of things. The servants of Christ will not choose their places. They are not peevish and petulant men who say unless they can go first they will not go at all. When a man says so, he dispossesses himself of the Christian name, and he crucifies the Son of God afresh, and puts him to an open shame. The servants of Christ say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Is it to stand at this door? Is it to run with this message? Is it to arise at midnight and flee away to tell some soul a word of heaven that he needs to hear? or is it to stand first in all the procession, and to be the leader of the people? What thou wilt —not what I will. To be what thou wilt have me is to be in heaven. Lord, undertake for me, appoint me my position, define my duty, and give me grace to bow in dishonour or to stand in princely dignity before men who do not know thee." That is the Christian spirit, and until that spirit is realised by Christian believers, and carried into effect by the Christian Church, we shall have rupture, distrust, controversy, and final disappointment of the bitterest kind.

So far, then, we need not be discontented with the typology of the text. Let us take another point, which may be described as eternal festival:—

"Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry" (v. 20).

This would seem to be part of the parable of the prodigal son before its time. A coarse view may be taken of all this festival, but it can only be taken by coarse minds. Eating and drinking, and making merry, may be to some persous very shocking proceedings, but to the true heart, the simple modest spirit, they are all sacramental, they have all high religious meanings, and it is to their spiritual applications that the pure soul looks. There are of course gluttonous men, wine-bibbers; even the Son of God was compared to such: but we need not regard the passage in this light, but as suggesting the home-life, plentifulness of all necessaries, and the resources so thankfully appropriated that in their appropriation they actually become luxuries. No Christian man eats for eating's sake, or drinks for the mere enjoyment, or makes merry simply because he offers sacrifice to the foolish spirit of frivolity; all these exercises and engagements are lifted up into their highest signification. We have read of the gourmand who would have all his dishes brought to the table in alphabetical order, and for aught we know he went daily through the whole alphabet. This typical feast of Solomon's has no reference to gluttony of that kind. We have read of Caligula who would never eat bread unless it was gilded —had a coating of gold over the crust; but we are not commending such men in representing Solomon's feast as the feast of fat things and wine upon the lees well refined, as being part of the viands and provision of the table of God, which is so abundantly —yea, lavishly—spread. When did God give just enough? When was there less at the end than there was at the beginning? When he had five loaves and fed five thousand, how many basketfuls of fragments took ye up? Let God be judged by the fragments, whoever found the loaves; let God be judged by the harvest, whoever lent the seed out of which it sprang. Do not, therefore, be discouraged because some coarse and debasing minds would lead you away from the spiritual suggestiveness of a text like this, and fix your eyes upon mere eating and mere drinking and upon the mirth of fools. Eating may be partaking of the broken body of Christ; drinking may be as the appropriation of his sacrificial blood; and as for the merriment, who commended it when the house resounded with music and the walls vibrated to the strains of melody, because the son who was

lost was found, who was dead was alive again? Take all these suggestions in their highest spiritual meanings.

Then there is the point of universal tribute :—

"And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life" (v. 21).

These words are not to be taken literally. Solomon was not king at that time over all the earth, but he was king over all Israel, and represented so large a royalty and noble a majesty that men were willing that he should be accounted chief of kings, princeliest of all the princes that ruled among the neighbouring nations. Here the type is perfect:

"Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Doth his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

Kings are to bow down before him, and gold and incense bring; kings of Sheba and Seba are to offer gifts to this great Christ of God, and all men will call the Redeemer blessed. We are willing that it should be so; yea, it is verily right that such tribute should be paid to him, for he loved us and gave himself for us; he washed us in his own blood; he hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. All that he is and has revealed himself to be, and all that he proposes to do, brings him before us as the one king who is worthy to reign from the river unto the ends of the earth. No sense of harmony is violated, no consciousness of right is marred; we feel that if there is to be one king his name should be Wonderful, Counsellor, Prince of Peace, the everlasting Christ of God. So in the tribute which is poured at the feet of Solomon we see what is yet to take place with regard to him whose feet were nailed to the cross for us.

Many persons are fond of quoting an expression in the twenty-fifth verse which describes social security under the reign of king Solomon.

"And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon."

There is hardly any sentence in the Old Testament more popular than this when describing the blessings of peace and the enjoyments of security. But the text is often falsely applied, it is not historically understood, and therefore is perverted to false and mischievous ends. Persons who are inclined to great quietness, who wish to take no part in the exciting controversies of the times, who love to fall into deep sleep, and let the ages pass away without troubling themselves as to their destiny and issue,—they describe their condition as sitting under their vine and under their fig tree. If they are, they have no right to be sitting there; they have no right to their vine and they have no right to the seat: they are wrong altogether. It is by this very spirit that the Church is weakened and debased. Let us take no part, say the persons we are referring to, in tumult and controversy, in political excitement and religious discussion, dispute, and contention, but do let us sit under our vine and under our fig tree. They are supposed to be respectable persons; they lyingly call themselves "good, old-fashioned people." Never was a greater falsehood spoken in the religious cause. The good, old-fashioned people were all fighters; they slept with one eye open; their sword was nearer than their pillow; they heard the bugle-blast, and answered it with hearts of fire. Good old-fashioned sort! If we were, no wrong could live in our presence, the liar could not tarry in our sight, no corner in all the house could hold the coward or the deceitful person. How did all Judah and all Israel come to have a vine and a fig tree under which to sit? Shall we listen to poetry about the vine and the fig tree, and forget David? Was Solomon the first king? Did Solomon plant the vine, or nurture the fig tree? The vine and fig tree were sown or planted by men who hazarded their lives for the truth's sake; who would give no sleep to their eyes nor slumber to their eyelids until they had done something worthy of the ark of God and the house of the Most High. When, therefore, we praise our peaceful time, and are thankful that we have nothing to do but exchange opinions which nobody wishes to hear, let us remember that the very sanctuary whose security we enjoy is founded in blood, and that the walls are built of the bones of dead men—heroes, valiant soldiers, and captains of God! It is right to value peace, it is right to be thankful for

security, for environment that cannot be violated, but whilst we congratulate ourselves upon the possession of such securities and privileges, let us raise our felicitation to a higher tone by thanking God that we follow men who counted not their lives dear unto themselves that they might serve the altar of God.

Then have we not in Solomon's history at the first what may be called sanctified pomp and circumstance?

"And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen" (v. 26).

Here again we must resort to spiritual interpretation in applying these circumstances to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his reigning triumphant Church. Christ is to have all resources at his command: all the ships are to sail from shore to shore on Christ's business; all the electric lines are to quiver with his messages; all the ways of travel are to be crowded with his messengers and missionaries and pilgrims and evangelists; "Holiness unto the Lord" is to be written upon the belts of the horses, and not a bird in the air but is to be part of the obedient household of the living Christ. Thus we see the spiritual meaning of all this pomp, and that spiritual meaning alone is the course apposite and applicable in the case of Jesus Christ. He had not where to lay his head: he shall have forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; he had to beg his bread: his Church shall have victuals provided: "for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing;" he was despised and rejected of men: he shall be the desire of all nations; he came unto his own, and his own received him not: they shall pray for his coming, and shall make their prayer impatient by its final word—Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly,—an impatience which he may not reply to, but which he will never chide.

And how did Solomon bear himself under all this grandeur? Was the purple too heavy for him? Was the gold too much? Was he dazzled by the sheen which blazed upon him on every side? Or was he greater than his house, and was he intellectually superior to his circumstances? The answer is—

"And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And

Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes. And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom" (vv. 29-34).

Mark wherein his excellence consisted: not in his horses or chariots or horsemen only, not in his eating and drinking and merriment merely, but where he was most supreme was in his wisdom. No man could answer an enigma as Solomon could answer it. We never knew how great a man Solomon was until other men competed with him. I have sat in one of our courts of justice and heard the most illustrious judge which England then had pronounce what I may call his final judgment. I did not know to what a speaker I was listening until the other judges began to give their judgments when the Master of the Rolls had ceased; then I knew under what a spell I had been held for one whole hour. So with this Solomon. Other men were clever, sharp, facile of mind, easy to flippancy in expression, and not without a species of merriment; but when Solomon spoke they all listened; they said, This is music; when he gave judgment, they held their peace. Now it is even so with the words of Christ: never man spake like this man. I hold, however, that he has spoken in many other languages than the one which he employed whilst he was in his earthly ministry. I find the words of Christ in the wise utterances and judgments of every language. In what language can we find finer sentiments than in the language of China? I do not say that Christ has never been in China, that his inspiration was not in the prophets of that great celestial empire so called. When I hear the great Chinese teachers say, "He who finds virtue to be a burden and vice a pleasure is a novice in both," I say this is none other than the counsel of God; this also cometh forth from him of Nazareth who was filled with all the fulness of God. So I do not exclude from the sanctuary anything of beauty moral and spiritual, but claim it in the name of Christ: this is a diamond

out of his crown, this is a flash from his eye, whose eyes were like flames of fire. We do Christ injustice when we find him only in certain places and in certain books; there we may find him definitely and peculiarly, with quite special revelations and benedictions, but wherever there is good, seize it, and stamp it with the image of Christ.

Was Solomon always in the banqueting-hall? Not he; he was much among the trees: "he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall." He was a great naturalist too: "he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes." Quite an Esau for love of nature and love of sport, love of study and sympathy with the fresh air and all things that live and sing. So far, if he will keep along this line, we need have no fear of him; the man who makes these his subjects will know how to conduct himself amid the blandishments of the palace. He had great enjoyment in music—"his songs were a thousand and five." Yet perhaps only one of them is retained in its entirety. It is enough. Even the Bible is limited as to bulk. A great deal was left out of the Bible, but nothing that is not of its own quality. What is in the Bible is enough—seed for bread, seed for flowers, sustenance for life. Think of the Bible as thus scattered. Even if we have but one of Solomon's songs, in that one, rightly interpreted, we have the whole number. So if all the things that Christ had spoken and done had been written, "even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." But we have enough: the Beatitudes will sow the ages with breadstuff throughout eternity if need be, and the parables would furnish the picture-galleries of centuries, and the centuries would never complain of monotony. Balance your riches by your reading. If you never open a book, I do not wonder that your gold counting has befooled you. There is nothing in the chink of it that ever gets into the soul with satisfaction to the best faculties. Balance your power by your beneficence, or you will become tyrants, despots, wicked men. Balance your feasts by your studies, and then the feast will do you no harm. When you awaken the world's attention see that the world comes to hear your wisdom, and not to look at your horses.

1 Kings v.

THE CO-OPERATION OF HIRAM.

HIRAM is first mentioned in 2 Samuel v. 11, and a parallel passage will be found in 1 Chron. xiv. 1, from which we learn that he sent workmen and materials to David for the building of his own palace. According to tradition, Hiram was a tributary or dependent monarch. The embassy which Hiram sent on this occasion was evidently meant to express the congratulations of the king of Tyre,—in 2 Chron. ii. 14,15 we find the words, "My lord," "My lord David thy father." There is a notable mixture of affection and reverence in the spirit which Hiram showed to Solomon; Hiram was "ever a lover of David," and yet he speaks of David in terms which an inferior would use to a superior. Hiram preserved the continuity of friendship, and herein showed himself an example, not only to monarchs but to other men. "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not." Solomon in returning an answer to the congratulations of Hiram was faithful to history as embodied in the person of his own father, and therefore was by so much qualified to continue what he believed to be the purpose and covenant of God. Solomon looked facts steadily in the face. In the book of Chronicles the condemnation which the Lord pronounced upon David is still more emphatically set forth: "But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight" (1 Chron. xxii. 8, xxviii. 3; 2 Chron. ii. 3).

Although Solomon was blessed with "rest on every side," and was enabled to look upon a future without so much as the shadow of an adversary upon it, yet he was determined not to be indolent. "And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God"—this is the language of a strong

man; this is the strength which increases by its own exercise. Suppose a man to come into the circumstances which we have described as constituting the royal position of Solomon, and suppose that man destitute of an adequate and all-controlling purpose, it is easy to see how he would become the victim of luxury, and how what little strength he had would gradually be withdrawn from him. But at all events in the opening of Solomon's career we see that the purpose was always uppermost, the soul was in a regnant condition, all outward pomp and circumstance was ordered back into its right perspective, and the king pursued a course of noble constancy as he endeavoured to realise the idea and intent of heaven. The same law applies to all prosperous men. To increase in riches is to increase in temptation, to indolence and self-idolatry: to external trust and vain confidence, to misanthropy, monopoly, and oppression; the only preventive or cure is the cultivation of a noble "purpose," so noble indeed as to throw almost into contempt everything that is merely temporal and earthly Solomon not only had inward and spiritual wisdom which comforted his mind, but he had an intention which required him always to travel out of himself, and to work for the glory of his kingdom and the benefit of his people. Every master, every great man, every leader should build a house for God, a school for the ignorant, an asylum for the destitute, or in some other way realise a sublime purpose in life. Then let riches come tenfold, and they will not be too much to carry out a benevolence which knows no bound.

Even the noblest purpose needs the co-operation of sympathetic and competent men:

"Now therefore command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto the Sidonians" (v. 6).

Thus the Jew seeks assistance from the Gentile in building the house of the Lord. How wonderful are the co-operations which are continually taking place in life! so subtly do they interblend, and make up that which is lacking in each other, that it is simply impossible to effect an exhaustive analysis. Nor would it be desirable that such an analysis should be completed. We

cannot live upon analysis. We should fix our minds upon the great fact that no man liveth unto himself, that no man is complete in himself, that every man needs the help of every other man, and thus we shall see how mysteriously is built the great temple of life, and is realised before the eyes of the universe the great purpose of God. Co-operation is only another word for the distributions which God has made of talent and opportunity. It might be supposed that co-operation was simply a human act; whereas in its outworking, it shows the marvellous distribution which God has made of capacity, resource, opportunity; how he has related one man to another, and one event to another; when we study co-operation in this light we see that it is but the under or visible side of divine providence, the bringing together of parts apparently sundered, yet which need only to approach one another to show that they were meant to act in harmony. Not only must there be co-operation between foreign powers, there must also be co-operation at home. This is made clear by the thirteenth verse:

"And king Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men."

In vain had Hiram responded in the language of generous sympathy if Israel itself had been a divided people. This must be the condition of the Church as a great working body in the world. It will be in vain that poetry, history, literature, music, and things which apparently lie outside the line of spiritual activity, send in their offers, tributes, and contributions, each according to its own kind, if the Church to which the offer is made is a divided and self-destroying body. When all Israel is one, the contributions of Tyre will be received with thankfulness and be turned to their highest uses. When the Church meets in one place with one accord, then there will come a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind; but that sound of blessing and inspiration will never come to a Church that is torn by intestinal strife.

A beautiful picture is given in verse fourteen:

"And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home."

The picture represents the difference between cutting down

and setting up; in other words, the difference between destruction and construction. It was easier to cut down than it was to build up. Enough could be cut down in one month to require two months for the putting of it together in architectural form. The two operations should always go on together. The business of the Church is to pull down, and to build up; even to use the materials of the enemy in building up the temple of the living God. The picture has an evident relation to the ease with which men can pull down faith and darken hope and unsettle confidence. What can be easier than to fell a tree which has required centuries in which to perfect its strength and beauty? Who could not in one hour, having made proper preparation, blow to pieces the finest fabric ever reared by the genius of man? Who could not by one blow destroy a picture painted by the hand of the greatest master? The picture also shows us the beautiful idea of foreign labour and home service being united in the same men. Thus the work of foreign missions should help the work of missions at home. Every idolatry that is thrown down abroad should be turned into a contribution for the upbuilding and strengthening of the Church at home. Sometimes there is greater difficulty at home than there is on the distant mountains or in the provinces of a foreign king. The Christian, turning all these historical instances to their highest spiritual uses, should know himself to be bound to destroy and to create, to tear up and to plant, and to conduct generally the double and contradictory work of uprooting error and planting the vine of heavenly truth.

"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers: so they prepared timber and stones to build the house" (vv. 17, 18).

The care thus shown of the foundation is another instance of the wisdom of Solomon. The stones which were used in the foundation were in no sense considered insignificant or worthless. We cannot read the epithets which are applied to them without being reminded of the foundation which God himself has laid in Zion. There is no straining of the merely historical event connected with Solomon's temple in seeing in it hints and suggestions regarding the greater temple of which it was but a faint emblem.

The stones which Solomon used are described as "great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones;" the terms which are used to describe the foundation which was laid in Zion are these—"A stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." We read also of the foundations of the wall of the city which John saw in vision—"The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

A curious illustration of the union between the permanent and the temporary is shown in all earthly arrangements. Solomon laid foundations which might have lasted as long as the earth itself endured. Judging by the foundations alone, one would have said concerning the work of Solomon, This is meant for permanence; no thought of change or decay ever occurred to the mind of the man who laid these noble courses. It is the same with ourselves in nearly all the relations of life. We know that we may die to-day, yet we lay plans which will require years and generations to accomplish. We are perfectly aware that our breath is in our nostrils, yet we build houses which we intend to stand for centuries—knowing that we cannot occupy them ourselves, yet by some impulse or instinct which we cannot control, in building for ourselves we build for others, and it is to the future that we owe the strength of the present. Yet we often speak as having no obligation to the future, or as if the future would do nothing for us, not knowing that it is the future which makes the present what it is, and that but for the future all our inspiration would be lost because our hope would perish. Let us see that our foundations are strong. He who is more anxious for decoration than solidity knows not the climate in which he builds, and knows not the forces by which his work will be assailed. In all building consider strength first, and beauty next. Especially let this be so in the building of character. Let even the foundations be of precious stones, as of jasper and sapphire, chalcedony and emerald, sardonyx and sardius, chrysolite and beryl, topaz and chrysoprasus, jacinth and amethyst. Having spent such great and costly care upon the foundations, surely we cannot but be just to ourselves in making the superstructure worthy of the base on which it stands.

A beautiful illustration of contrast and harmony is to be found in the distribution which Solomon made of his workers and the labour they were required to undertake :—"And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains ; beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred, which ruled over the people that wrought in the work" (vv. 15, 16). Here we find burden-bearers, hewers in the mountains, officers, and rulers. There was no standing upon one level or claiming of one dignity. Each man did what he could according to the measure of his capacity, and each man did precisely what he was told to do by his commanding officer. It is in vain to talk about any equality that does not recognise the principle of order and the principle of obedience. Our equality must be found in our devotion, in the pureness of our purpose, in the steadfastness of our loyalty, and not in merely official status or public prominence. The unity of the Church must be found, not in its forms, emoluments, dignities, and the like, but in the simplicity of its faith and the readiness of its eager and affectionate obedience. Looking for a moment at the seventeenth verse, we find the arrangement perfected by the words "and the king commanded." Now let us read the whole as if it were a catalogue—burden-bearers, hewers in the mountains, officers, rulers,—and the king commanded. There is the true picture of a working Church. There is no indignity in any department of Church service. It is honour enough for an angel to go upon any errand which God may appoint. Looking at ourselves and amongst ourselves, we may begin to speak about diversity of honours, but looking at God and taking our commands from him, we shall not fasten our attention upon the thing which has to be done as compared with something which another man may be called to do, but shall see in the glory of the King, honour enough to fill not only our ambition but our imagination.

1 Kings vi.-vii.

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

THESE chapters should be compared with 2 Chron. iii.–iv. indeed the whole story should be read in the various forms which it is made to assume in all the historical books, for without this survey of all the parts we might easily come to false conclusions regarding many of the details. In this matter of the history of the temple the Kings and the Chronicles must be considered as filling up what is lacking in each other, and only the whole can be taken as supplying a true basis of exposition.

These chapters are almost wholly devoted to a technical description of the temple and other building works of Solomon. It is profitable to compare the two chapters with the descriptions given in Exodus xxv., xxvii., xxxv., and xxxviii. of the building of the tabernacle, which may be taken as an outline of the construction of the temple itself in many important particulars. This account of the temple, too, may be compared with advantage with the prophetic vision which was granted to Ezekiel (xl.-xlvi.).

The temple which Solomon built for the Lord was small as to mere arithmetical dimensions, but large when taken in its spiritual signification. "The length thereof was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits." It is curious to notice that the temple itself was in all its proportions the duplicate of the tabernacle, each dimension however being doubled, and the whole therefore being in cubical measure eight times the size of the house built by Moses. If the usual calculation of eighteen inches to the cubit be taken, the whole measurement would stand thus:— length ninety feet, width thirty feet, height forty-five feet. The temple was only a shrine for the ministering priests, the outer court, or outer courts, constituting the meeting place of the

great assembly of the congregation. The temple relied for its magnificence not upon its size, but upon the costliness of the material, and the all but incalculable wealth of the decoration by which it was enriched and adorned. Mark the point of progress which has been reached in this historical development of the idea of the sanctuary. We have seen what the tabernacle in the wilderness was—how frail, yet how beautiful; we now see how substantial the temple is, how strongly founded, and how patiently elaborated in all its costly details. We see also that the dimensions of the sanctuary are doubled. This fact of the dimensions being doubled is full of moral significance. The idea of the sanctuary is making progress, more space is required for it; yet there is no undue haste, nothing of the nature of obtrusive encroachment but everything of the quality of steady and irresistible progress: as we see the enlarged dimensions we hear a great voice saying, "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." The sanctuary is never diminished in size or in importance; it is a growing quantity; though growing sometimes slowly and almost indeed imperceptibly, yet the line is one of progress and never of recession.

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building "(vi. 7).

Here was a great erection which proceeded towards its accomplishment without noise or tumult. Yet there is nothing wrong in noise itself. In all preparation there must be signs of energy and restlessness and even of apparent confusion, yet a solemn and steadfast purpose may be running through all the energetic engagements. Who can tell how many preparations are going on in distant places, the full purport and use of which cannot be understood apart from the sanctuary which is being silently put up? This may be the meaning of many a war and controversy and distressing tumult. Whilst the heathen are raging, they may be undergoing a process of preparation for incorporation into the temple of God. God sitteth upon the floods, and all the uproar is controlled by himself. If we could have looked upon Lebanon at the time when the hewers of trees

were engaged upon it, we should have seen nothing but confusion. Before the hewers of wood went to Lebanon that famous locality was proverbial for its beauty and fragrance. Lebanon was watered by the streams from the snowy heights when all Palestine was parched up. Now look at Lebanon when the fellers of trees are carrying out their purpose: how harsh the sounds, how crashing the fall, how like a devastation the whole appearance; looked at within its own limits, the scene is one that pains the heart. Was it for this violent overthrow that all this noble beauty was perfected? We must take the larger view, and turn not only to Lebanon but to Mount Moriah, and there observe what is being done with the material which Lebanon supplies. "Behold, I build an house to the name of the Lord my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts of the Lord our God." Thus the two pictures must be brought together—the confusion on Lebanon, and the construction upon Mount Moriah. "Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite." The noisy timber-fellers and the quiet builders belong to the same great company of workers for the Lord God of Israel. The noisy men must not complain of the quietness of those who go about their work without making any noise; nor must the quiet constructors rebuke the energy of men without whose activity they themselves could not proceed to lay another course in all the sacred structure of the sanctuary. We need the son of thunder, and the son of consolation; the great wind, and the silent sun; the tempestuous rain, and the noiseless dew: all these must be considered as part of the great ministry which God has appointed for the accomplishment of his purposes upon the earth.

Now whilst the work is proceeding so quietly and satisfactorily, the voice of caution is heard from heaven:—

"And the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and

execute my judgments, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father: and I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel" (vi. 11-13).

A wonderful thing is this, that in the midst of labour God is constantly assuring us that his presence is conditional and that his blessing is therefore contingent upon our obedience. We are not to be so entranced by the progress of the work as to forget that it is God's work and not ours. Nor are we to be so pleased with the silent advancement of the kingdom of heaven as to suppose that there is no further need of energy and watchfulness on our part; the language of indolence would be: This temple will advance whatever I may do; it is useless therefore for me to put myself to inconvenience, or to undergo any process of costly expenditure; it is evident that the temple will be advanced, do or not do what I may; I will therefore take my ease, and let providence work out its own ends. Even when the temple was rising at Mount Moriah, the Lord came to Solomon with this admonition. There is always a great "If" in all the arrangements which God makes with his Church. We hold our position by our good conduct. The answer will not come down unless the prayer be first sent up. "If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers." Notice the conjunction of the words in verse twelve—"If thou wilt walk. . . . then will I perform." How continuous and how exacting is the discipline of life; on what a slender thread apparently hangs the fulfilment of all the divine promises; on the other hand, how rich is the reply of God to those who really walk in the way of his statutes and make it the business of their lives to fulfil all his commands. Very sweet are the words—"And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel." It would appear that the one object of the building of the sanctuary was that God might dwell among his people. "I will set my tabernacle among

you . . . . I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." Nor were these blessings confined to the Old Testament saints: they are the heritage and everlasting joy of the Christian Church. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men: yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." No temple after the pattern of Solomon's magnificent sanctuary do we now rear, because we have come to the point in spiritual development in which the living temple is greater than any stones which can be made to symbolise it—"Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." If God promised not to forsake his people Israel, he has renewed his promise in relation to those who are in Christ Jesus his Son, partakers of his divine nature by the energy of a living faith—He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;" Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The living temple which is being built by the Holy Ghost is not left to be overthrown by the winds of the enemy, by tempestuous rains, or by the lightning of human anger; God having begun it will continue it, and complete it, and the temple of God shall stand sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.

It is curious to notice the use which is made of an image with which we became familiar whilst reading the earliest portions of the book of Genesis—the image, namely, of the cherubims.

"And within the oracle he [Solomon] made two cherubims of olive tree, each ten cubits high. And five cubits was the one wing of the cherub, and five cubits the other wing of the cherub: from the uttermost part of the one wing unto the uttermost part of the other were ten cubits. And the other cherub was ten cubits: both the cherubims were of one measure and one size. The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so was it of the other cherub. And he set the cherubims within the inner house: and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubims, so that the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house" (vi. 23-27).

We cannot tell what the cherubims were. God "placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life," so we read in the book of Genesis. In Exodus we read—"Thou shalt make two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat." In Ezekiel we read—"He spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. Then the glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory. And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh" (x. 2-5). It is spiritually useful now and again to have the imagination challenged by problems which do not admit of immediate solution. We suppose ourselves to be acquainted with life in all its ranges and particulars, whereas we are being continually shown, even by science itself, that we have hardly begun the study of that greatest of mysteries. When we know all life we shall know God himself. All the life we do know, either with the naked eye or with the instruments of science, is but part of the eternity of God. We should need to bring all life together into one focus, into one massive and perfect completeness, before we could begin to form even an initial idea of what is meant by the life divine. We are not, then, bounded by such life as is represented by man, or beast, or fish, or bird; there is an upward as well as a downward line from man; and that upward line carries us in the direction of angels and principalities and powers, of glowing seraphim and cherubim that are radiant with knowledge. Along that line we cannot rise very far. It is something to know that far beyond anything we have yet known of life there are mysteries of existence which baffle our fancy, and yet stimulate our piety, creating within us a desire to grow up into the life of God in all things, and to see the universe from the point of view occupied by the Son of man himself.

"But Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house" (vii. 1).

A very curious thing this, that whilst Solomon was building the temple of God he was also building his own house. It does not follow that when a man is building his own house he is also building the temple of God; but it inevitably follows that when a man is deeply engaged in promoting the interests of the divine sanctuary, he is most truly laying the foundations of his own house, and completing the things which most nearly concern himself. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." No man loses anything by taking part in the building of the temple of God. He comes away from that sacred erection with new ideas concerning what may be made of the materials he is using in the construction of his own dwelling-place. The Spirit of God acts in a mysterious manner along all this line of human conduct. The eyes are enlightened in prayer: commercial sagacity is sharpened in the very process of studying the oracles of God: the spirit of honourable adventure is stirred and perfected by the highest speculations in things divine, when those speculations are balanced by beneficence of thought and action in relation to the affairs of men.

Turning again from the king's palace to the house of the Lord, we cannot but be struck with the grandeur of the appointments which Solomon made:—

"And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained unto the house of the Lord: the altar of gold, and the table of gold, whereupon the shewbread was, and the candlesticks of pure gold, five on the right side, and five on the left, before the oracle, with the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs of gold, and the bowls, and the snuffers, and the basons, and the spoons, and the censers of pure gold; and the hinges of gold, both for the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, and for the doors of the house, to wit, of the temple" (vii. 48-50).

The "altar of God" is the altar of incense. On that altar incense was to be burned morning and evening. To the Israelites the offering of incense typified the offering of worship which God would accept. The word "shewbread" properly means *bread of the face* or *presence of God*, called in the Septuagint version bread of offering or bread of presentation. This bread was clearly of

the nature of a eucharistic offering, whereby man acknowledged that the whole sustenance of life is derived alone from God, and indicating in a way which the spirit only can understand that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding out of the mouth of God. The candlesticks were of pure gold; the flowers and the lamps and the tongs were of gold; the bowls and the snuffers and the basons and the spoons and the censers were of pure gold; the hinges of the doors of the inner house, the most holy place, were hinges of gold. All these things are to be taken typically when we come to apply them to the Christian Church. "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." Every prayer is to be as pure gold. Every sermon is to be as an offering wrought in pure gold. Everything done in the sanctuary is to be done with the care of men who are entrusted with the charge of pure gold. There is to be nothing inexpensive, frivolous, worthless, careless in any part of the service of the sanctuary. The hinge and the altar, the spoon and the candlestick, the lamp and the bowl, are all necessary. Nor is one to be disparaged at the expense of the other. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." Am I a hinge upon the door of the sanctuary? Am I but as a bason or a bowl, or as a pair of snuffers, in the service of the temple? It is enough. We are all wrought out of the same precious gold and worked by the same Master. Let us rest in that sweet thought. The hinge in itself may not be worth much, but it is part of the king's gold, and he will require an account of that gold when he comes to audit the affairs of time.

We now come to the close, so far as the building is concerned. We read, "so was ended all the work that king Solomon made for the house of the Lord"—(vii. 51). We read in the book of Exodus, "so Moses finished the work." By and by we shall read, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to

do," and later on we shall hear the words, "It is finished." There is a tone of melancholy in the words which announce even the completion of the temple. Who would not be always engaged in enlarging and perfecting the house of the Lord? Surely the builders could not turn away from the temple in whose building they would take no more part without sighing that their work was done. Has not many a commentator been made sad when he reached the last verse which he was expounding? Has not many an author owned that he was sorry to part with the imaginary characters whose history he had been tracing for many a day? Do we not feel also a pang at the heart when some long sweet interview as between friend and friend is ended? We should never forget that there is often more joy in the process than there is merely at the point of completion.

Herein is a great lesson for workers: they should find their heaven in their work, and not suppose that it comes at the end of their labour; the labour itself is the rest when the heart is attuned to the purposes of God, and the will can only find its rest in obedience to the commands of God. It is not every man, however, who is permitted to see the end of his work. How many die ere the topstone is brought on! How many true labourers have almost prayed to be allowed to see the completion of their ministry, either in speech or in literature, in the education of their families or in the consolidation of their business! To live but a few years longer, then the capital would be put upon the pillar, then the circle would be completed, and then the long rest of death might come. But we cannot tell how all this may be ordered by the divine hand. "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch:" "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." All we have to do is to hold our work as a divine appointment, to carry it on, to suspend it, or to lay it down just as God may please. He will make some compensation for the disappointment and the bitterness of the heart that longs to see the last touch put to the labour of a lifetime. Yes, blessed be God, we cannot tell how all that sorrow may be made up to us in the brighter scene. We may then be made to see how foolish we were and ignorant in wishing to remain outside heaven a little longer; yet who can tell but we may be shown that even in

heaven we can do something towards completing the work we began on earth. Here we must simply stand, and wonder, and adore. Sometimes there comes a thought over the heart that it will be impossible that our connection with these present spheres and opportunities and relations shall be for ever dissolved. Then comes the sweet and consolatory thought that even from on high we may be permitted to do something, in a way not now known, and in a way not now to be measured, towards carrying forward to maturity the work which it was the joy and the very heaven of our life to take part in. But why distress our imagination with such inquiries, or wear out the heart with such solicitudes? "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." It is joy enough to be permitted to take any part in the work, without desiring to see that work completed in all its meaning. In the bright by and by of heaven, in the long, long days of celestial summer, in the peace and rest and ineffable quiet of the land on high, we shall see why it was that our work was interrupted, that the sentence we were just uttering was punctuated by death, and that the best things of our lives were intercepted and turned to apparent uselessness and ruin. We must wait—and we must hope!

SELECTED NOTE.

The first who planned the erection of a stone-built sanctuary was David, who, when he was inhabiting his house of cedar, and God had given him rest from all his enemies, meditated the design of building a temple in which the ark of God might be placed, instead of being deposited "within curtains," or in a tent as hitherto. This design was at first encouraged by the prophet Nathan; but he was afterwards instructed to tell David that such a work was less appropriate for him, who had been a warrior from his youth, and had shed much blood, than for his son, who should enjoy in prosperity and peace the rewards of his father's victories. Nevertheless, the design itself was highly approved as a token of proper feelings towards the Divine King, (2 Sam. vii. 1-12; 1 Chron. xvii. 1-14, xxviii.). We learn, moreover, from 1 Kings v. and 1 Chron. xxii. that David had collected materials which were afterwards employed in the erection of the temple, which was commenced four years after his death, about B.C. 1012, in the second month, that is, the the month of Siv (comp. 1 Kings vi. 1; 2 Chron. iii. 2), 480 years after the Exodus from Egypt. We thus learn that the Israelitish sanctuary had remained movable more than four centuries subsequent to the conquest of Canaan. "In the fourth year of Solomon's reign was the foundation of the house of the Lord laid, in the month Siv: and in the eleventh year, in the month Bul, which is the eighth month, was the house finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it. So was he seven years in building it."

1 Kings viii.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

IT is remarkable in connection with the dedication of the temple how the leading part was taken throughout by king Solomon. One would have thought that in the dedication of a sanctuary the leading men would have been the priests, Levites, scribes, and other persons distinctively identified with religious functions and responsibilities. We find, however, that exactly the contrary is the case. The priest occupied a second and tributary position, but it is the king who consecrates the sanctuary, and it is the king who offers the great prayer at its dedication. The question arises, Was not Solomon in reality more than king? Or, being a king, was he not, according to the divine ideal of Israel, a priest unto God? Did he not indeed occupy a kind of typical position as being in anticipation none other than the great high priest Jesus Christ himself? The kingship and the priesthood are combined in the Christian character of the later dispensation: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation." This is precisely what Solomon was, namely, a "royal priest!" We are not, therefore, to look upon Solomon as merely in some official capacity superseding all the officers, and dignitaries of the nation, but as in a mysterious way overshadowing the system of things that was to be under the reign of the true Melchisedek. This is further illustrated by the circumstance that "king Solomon, and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude" (v. 5). The counterpart of this we find in the epistle to the Hebrews, where we read that "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;" and again, "by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." We take it, therefore, that in the instance before us

there is no authority for kings merely as such, that is to say, in their strictly official capacity, to take a leading part in religious ceremonials. Bright indeed will be the day when every king as a man, a Christian, a loyal servant of Christ, shall take part in everything that concerns the sanctuary; but this is a very different thing from calling upon a royal personage simply on the ground of his royalty to sanctify a religious occasion by the exercise of royal prerogatives.

Solomon and his associates having done all in their power to bring the temple to a completion, we read, as in the case of the tabernacle erected by Moses, that "it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the Lord" (v. 10). So intense was the manifestation of the divine presence, "that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord" (v. 11). It was precisely the same in the case of Moses, concerning whom we read, "And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." The conclusion of man's work would seem to be the beginning of God's; in other words, when man can go no further, God takes up the line of revelation, and continues it to the limit of human capacity. As we saw in the case of Moses, so in the case of Solomon we see that we have no right to expect the divine presence until our human resources have been exhausted. This indeed is the condition upon which the Almighty has worked in all the dispensations of providence. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." We know, therefore, the way by which to secure the divine revelation amongst us: sighing, repining, moaning, rebuking one another, criticism of methods may all be dismissed as utterly futile; we can only rely upon the disclosure of the divine presence by doing all that within us lies to fulfil our own personal religious duty. We have seen how Solomon and his associates worked, how heartily and lovingly they laboured together in the construction

of the temple; and now when we read that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord was dazzlingly shown, we feel as if we had concluded, not an ebullition of sentiment, but a process of logic. The glory of the Lord follows sequentially, as if by a gracious necessity, upon all the labour which Solomon and his colleagues had laboured to do.

Now we approach the great prayer by which the temple was dedicated. The house itself was nothing. It was but a gilded sepulchre, an elaborate and costly vacancy. First of all, therefore, we stand convinced that however much we may do technically, it can only be regarded as in a preparatory or introductory capacity. We can build the house, but we cannot supply the tenant. Solomon and those united with him in this holy labour did not walk round about the temple saying, Behold how beautiful a thing we have created, how lavish has been the generosity of Hiram, and how skilful have been the men whose hands fashioned all this beauty! Not a word of praise do we hear concerning their own work; they seem rather to hasten into the house that they may behold some manifestation of the divine presence and rejoice that God was still king and ruler in Israel. It is beautiful to notice that even at this early period of religious development the spiritual ruled over the material, and the revelation of God even in the mystery of a cloud was considered an infinitely greater thing than all the architectural wonder which had been embodied by the genius and munificence of kings.

Solomon's conception of the personality and dignity of God stands out quite conspicuously in the pages of history for its unrivalled sublimity. He speaks as one who was well instructed in the mysteries of the kingdom. In this prayer of Solomon's there is what some persons often mistakenly call preaching even in the language of devotion. We are tempted to form too narrow a conception of prayer, and then to exclude from prayer much that in reality belongs to the very spirit and essence of communion. Solomon here tells God what he is, magnifies his attributes, adores his personality, as if giving God information regarding his own Deity; this would be the shallow criticism passed upon the prayer by those who do not understand what

prayer is in all its scope and grandeur. Prayer is not request only, it is fellowship, communion, identification with God; it is the soul pouring itself out just as it will in all the tender compulsion of love, asking God for blessings, praising God for mercies, committing itself to God in view of all the mystery and peril of the future. When we enlarge our idea of prayer so as to take in all its meaning, we shall find that many a man has been praying who thought he was only preaching or discoursing upon the attributes of God. It is marvellous how in the Old Testament darkness is brought in as if it had been specially chosen for sacred purposes by the living God. Thus Solomon: "The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness." Thus the psalmist: "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick clouds of the skies;" and the psalmist again: "Clouds and darkness are round about him;" and Isaiah says, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."

Solomon having thus addressed the God of Israel, turns to providence as revealed in the history of the chosen people, goes back even so far as the bringing-forth of Israel out of Egypt, and indicates point after point, at least suggestively, until David was elected to reign over the people Israel, and purposed as king to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel. Solomon does not take the whole credit to himself for the origination of this idea of the temple. He connects his action with the purpose that was in the heart of David his father—"And it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord. God of Israel" (v. 17). Solomon could not but remember this, for David had made a special communication to him upon the subject—"And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God." In his prayer Solomon does not refer to the reason which had formerly been given by himself to Hiram for God rejecting the purposed temple on the part of David. Solomon puts the case with exquisite delicacy: "And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (v. 18). Thus the purpose was commended as if itself had been a temple. We must not neglect the great principle

which is suggested by this commendation. We shall be credited with doing many things which we only purposed to do. If we make a vow and indolently fail to fulfil it, then that vow shall be reckoned against us, and it shall be turned into an element increasing the severity of our judgment; but if for some reason, over which we have no control, we are unable to complete our wishes, or embody our intentions in actual fact, God will look upon those intentions as being themselves acceptable, and he will commend us as if we had brought them to maturity. "The Lord is very pitiful and kind." The Lord is infinitely generous in all his construction of human motive and purpose. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he reading the heart; and knowing how human life is limited by uncontrollable circumstances, it shall be found at the last that many who were by no means conspicuous for Christian activity have really been amongst the leaders of the age in which they were unknown. A purpose will be regarded in heaven as equivalent to a prayer, and the answer to that prayer may come through others rather than to and through the suppliant himself. One man prays and another receives the answer, as one man sows and another reaps; thus the interblending of human interests and relations is again and again illustrated from a thousand various points.

The temple, so beautiful and so costly, is not to be associated with anything that is merely religiously mystic. This is not a tent of superstition, nor a habitation created for the purpose of indulging spiritual romances which can never have any bearing upon actual human life. Throughout his prayer we discover on the part of Solomon how thoroughly he identifies the house of God with all human interests. We have seen before that the house of God is really the house of man, and that being in the largest sense the house of man, it becomes through that very circumstance the house of God. The sanctuary should always be regarded as the home of the people. It is in the sanctuary that human life should be interpreted in all the meaning of its pain and tragedy. Men should be able to say, Now that we are baffled and perplexed by the things which are round about us in this world, and now that we find ourselves utterly unable to solve the problems which crowd upon our distracted minds, let us go unto

the house of the Lord, for there we shall feel upon our souls the breath of eternity, and there we shall hear music which will quiet the tumult which carnal reason can neither explain nor control. Dark will be the day when men can hear nothing in the sanctuary but words which they cannot understand, references which have no bearing upon immediate agony, and discussions which simply titilate the intellect and the fancy but never reach the dark and mortal sorrows of the heart.

In the twenty-seventh verse Solomon raises the question of all ages :

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth ? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee ; how much less this house that I have builded ?"

How natural it is that human imagination should be confounded by the impossibility of the infinite God locating himself within finite space. We do not consider that it is because God is infinite that he can so to say thus become finite. The finite never can become infinite, but it would seem to belong to infinite perfection to adapt itself to human limitation and necessity. God himself has addressed the ages in a tone precisely coincident with the language of Solomon : "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool : where is the house that ye build unto me ? and where is the place of my rest ?" Solomon was therefore strictly within the line of revelation when he propounded the solemn inquiry. Everything depends upon our point of view in considering this great question of God's condescension. Working from the point of our mere reverence, it would seem to delight us to put away the idea that God can trouble himself with any creature, how radiant and noble soever, which he has created : between the highest angel and himself there must always be the distance of infinity : so our very reverence may be turned into an instrument of temptation, or may be so perverted as to exclude from us all the blessings of heaven. This is a very subtle temptation, and is to be guarded against with no ordinary watchfulness. Strange as it may appear, man may think himself able to evade certain responsibilities by reducing his own dignity to a minimum and commenting in a tone of self-deprecation upon his littleness and worthlessness. On the other

hand, the Christian teacher must insist that the very greatness of God constitutes no small part of his ability to accommodate himself to all the circumstances which mark the history of right. Let us therefore rather dwell upon the goodness of God than upon his majesty: upon his purpose in creating us, rather than upon his contempt for the things which he has created: whilst it is right to suppress anything like vanity concerning our own importance, it is also right to suppose that the purpose of God in our creation is his best warrant for coming to us in our insignificance and humiliation.

One might well think that the millennium had set in with the solemn dedication of the temple, and that all things would begin anew, and certainly that the time of tragedy, rebellion, and suffering had for ever passed away. We find however that Solomon orders his prayer in such a manner and tone as to recognise distinctly the fact that all things which had ever occurred which could try the faith, the patience, and the virtue of men would occur again and again to the end of the chapter. Thus we find in the prayer such words as these:—"If any man trespass against his neighbour;" "When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy"; "When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain; "If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities;" "If thy people go out to battle against their enemy;" "If they sin against thee (for there is no man that sinneth not)" (vv. 31-46). These are remarkable words to have been used upon such an occasion as the dedication of the temple. They show a wonderful conception of human life on the part of the royal suppliant. He does not say, Now that this temple is erected there will be no more plague, nor sin, nor war, nor difficulty in human life: God will now from this point of time so order things that there will be no more sin, nor crying, nor pain, nor death; this temple shall be as heaven upon the earth. No; on the contrary: though the temple stands as a monument of human piety and as a fulfilment of a divine promise, human life will go on in all the variety of its experience much as it had gone on from the beginning. What then, is there nothing in the point of history thus established by the building of this holy house?

Henceforth it is to be understood that whatever happens admits of religious treatment, and is to be taken to the temple itself for consideration and adjustment. God does not prevent many things which are even evil and distressing; but he overrules all things to high ends. We cannot enter into the reasons which limit what may be termed the preventive ministry of God: we wonder indeed that Satan is permitted to live: that he is not slain in the night-time and prevented from ever going about as a roaring lion: why this does not take place we cannot tell: to such enigmas there is no reply. Our satisfaction is to know that even Satan is in the hands of the living God, and that he may be used in some mysterious way for assisting the spiritual education of the world. It is something to know that our real necessities are named in prayer, and are regarded by wise and great men as subjects for divine treatment and blessing. It does the heart good to hear one's own peculiar sorrow named in the prayer which is offered in the great congregation. A tender nearness is thus realised without the irritation of conscious personality. We feel that the pastor who thus prays understands human nature, looks upon human history with wise eyes, and knows exactly what blessings to ask for when he pleads with the king of heaven. Prayers that consist exclusively of adoration may exalt our sense of reverence; but prayers that descend into the details of personal suffering and loss come most healingly to the heart with all the gracious comfort of heaven. Such was the prayer of Solomon. The people who heard it heard their own history treated from a religious point of view; and they must have been conscious that judgment did not lie far from the language of entreaty.

Solomon recognises God as the ruler of providence and the controller of all nature. He is not afraid to trace the absence of rain to an ordinance of the Most High. A perusal of the history of his own people would make it clear that from early times God had been recognised as ruling over the elements of nature—"I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass." "Thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron." "Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the

earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains." Not only is God regarded as ruling over providence and nature, but as penetrating human hearts and reading human motives—"Give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)." If there is one truth in the holy record presented more consistently than another it is this power of God to read the human soul. "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off." Nor is this a discovery on the part of man, it is a distinct revelation on the part of God himself—"I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works." Thus is the dominion of God enlarged by the religious imagination of Solomon; and thus, from the other point of view, is the revelation of God confirmed by the testimony of those who have most profoundly studied his ways and purposes in the earth.

Let us rejoice in view of all this historical detail, and in view of all the ceremonialism embodied in the temple of Solomon, that we "are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest;" we "are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." The great mystery of sacrifice for sin has been accomplished once for all. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. We are not to rest in this assurance as in an abstract doctrine but are to apply it to practical uses—"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter

into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." We have also come to greater simplicity in prayer. Compare the prayer which Jesus Christ offered as an example unto his disciples with the prayer which Solomon offered at the dedication of the temple, and mark in the contrast the development in spiritual thought and religious feeling which is thus indicated. But every man must pray in his own tongue wherein he was born; it is natural for some men to use the language of highest adoration, almost to sing psalms in the midst of their religious exercises before the throne, to dwell with minuteness of detail upon all the care and love of God as shown in the providence of life; in all these matters each man must be faithful to his own constitution and temperament. In this, as in all other things, the fear of man bringeth a snare; so when we pray we must forget human criticism, and in our own way come to the throne of the heavenly grace, telling God all that is in our hearts, and asking from him such things as we think we have need of.

Solomon, having ended his prayer, "arose from before the altar of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to heaven. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice," and in that blessing he made one declaration which cannot but be quoted from age to age with increasing emphasis and joy,—"there hath not failed one word of all his good promise." This is the continual testimony of the Church. "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass." "Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you and not one thing hath failed thereof." Thus with hardly any variation of language is the continuance of the divine goodness reaffirmed. This is matter of personal experience. Every man can examine his own life, and see wherein he has been faithful, and wherein he has been faithless, and say distinctly whether faithfulness has not been followed by benediction, and faithlessness by disapprobation. Many promises remain yet to be fulfilled. Specially there remains the promise to be fulfilled that

God will be with his people in the valley of the shadow of death. There is no discharge in that war! Every man must fight that tremendous battle alone; there comes a moment when human friendship and human love can do nothing for him but pray and watch and hope: let us so live that when we come to the hour and the article of death we may be surprised by the gentleness of God in his way of taking up his people unto himself, and may the only question which we have to ask of death be, Where is thy sting? and of the grave, Where is thy victory? These triumphant conditions can only be realised by continual and growing faith in him who is the resurrection and the life. Let us be thankful for temples and sanctuaries of every name whilst we are upon the earth, and so live, and think, and grow in grace that all these things shall appear to us as small compared with the revelation which is yet to be made of the infinite spaces, the radiant heavens, the everlasting liberties of celestial citizenship.

SELECTED NOTE.

After seven years and a half the work was completed, and the day came to which all Israelites looked back as the culminating glory of their nation. Their worship was now established on a scale as stately as that of other nations, while it yet retained its freedom from all worship that could possibly become idolatrous. Instead of two rival sanctuaries, as before, there was to be one only. The ark from Zion, the tabernacle from Gibeon, were both removed (2 Chron. v. 5) and brought to the new temple. The choirs of the priests and Levites met in their fullest force, arrayed in white linen. Then, it may be, for the first time, was heard the noble hymn, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." The trumpeters and singers were "as one" in their mighty Hallelujah—"O praise the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever" (2 Chron. v. 13). Throughout the whole scene the person of king Solomon is the one central object, compared with whom even priests and prophets are for the time subordinate. Abstaining, doubtless, from distinctively priestly acts, such as slaying the victims and offering incense, he yet appears, even more than David did in the bringing up of the ark, in a liturgical character. He, and not Zadok, blesses the congregation, offers up the solemn prayer, dedicates the temple. The solemn day was followed by a week of festival, synchronising with the Feast of Tabernacles, the time of the completed vintage. Representatives of all the tribes, elders, fathers, captains, proselytes, it may be, from the newly-acquired territories in Northern Syria (2 Chron. vi. 32; vii. 8)—all were assembled, rejoicing in the actual glory and the bright hopes of Israel. For the king himself then, or at a later period (the narrative of 1 Kings ix. and 2 Chron vii. leaves it doubtful) there was a strange contrast to the glory of that day. There was a danger near at hand.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, we bless thee that thy tabernacle is with men upon the earth. Thou hast a house even here, in the very world which has been spoiled and darkened by sin. Thou hast not forsaken the prodigal earth; still there remain upon it proofs of thy daily care, thy continual and abounding love; still, therefore, may we say, The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, and the fulness of the sea is also thine. We thank thee for the house which is as a strong tower to which we may continually resort. When thou dost shut the door, no man can open it; when thou hast enclosed us within the rock of thy protection, no enemy can come nigh unto us. Have us ever in thy holy keeping; give us to feel that thou dost so value us, through Jesus Christ thy Son, that no hair of our head shall be hurt, nor shall the smell of fire pass upon us in the furnace of trial. If thou wilt thus comfort us, thy comfort will become our strength; we shall be inspired by it, and repay all the tender solace by fuller obedience and more urgent industry; so shalt thou have answer to thine own reply: we pray unto thee, and thou dost answer us, and we return our reply in life well spent because of the inspiration and sustenance of the Holy Ghost. Our whole life is thine: the shape and purpose thereof thou knowest, and the end of it, soon or late, stands clearly before thee. Thou dost see the end from the beginning. There is no beginning to thee, nor is there any end. Thou sittest upon the circle of eternity. All things are set before thee now and evermore. Enable us, therefore, without urgency and impatience, to await the will of God, and to do that will with all love, simplicity, and earnestness; knowing that whether the Son of man come early or late, at midday or at midnight, we shall be ready, by the grace which he has given, to begin the eternal feast at his bidding. We commend one another to thy loving care. Thou knowest what a trial life is to many: how heavy its burdens, how entangled its perplexities, how stinging its disappointments, and how its fairest buds are often blighted and withered ere they be fully shaped. Thou knowest all these things. Thou knowest what medicine we have need of to heal our diseases, what comforts we specially need to overcome the severest distresses, and nothing wilt thou withhold from us that is good for the upholding and strengthening of our frail life. The Lord's own morning shine upon us; the light that is above the brightness of the sun make day for us, and that day shall be as the summer of heaven. We pray now and always in the sweet name of Jesus, the great name Jesus Christ, the glorious name: Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Herein we know not the meaning of all we say, but the saying of it, under the inspiration of thy Spirit, makes our hearts warm, and makes life worth living. Amen.

1 Kings ix.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER ANSWERED.

WE have just studied that most wonderful prayer of ancient history, and have been charmed first with its spiritual music; then with its great intellectual conception; then with its appreciation of human necessities, and altogether with its fine, genial, kingly sympathy with all classes and conditions of men. Placing ourselves at this point of history, and listening to the noble supplication which the king poured out to the majesty of heaven, we say instinctively, Never man prayed like this man: nothing has been omitted from the desire of his love; this man is not only king but subject, student, historian, philosopher, statesman, saint: the whole register of the human mind seems to be covered by this king whilst he is bending before high heaven, and talking to the sovereign and Father of the universe about profound subjects and immediate human necessities. Now the prayer is done. We have seen Solomon rise from his knees, and unclasp his hands, and stretch them forth and bless the people; and thus opening a new page in the history of Israel, and thus representing the dawn of a new era, in which surely there could have been no rebellion, no unkindness, no alienation, no war, no sin.

The prayer is done. It is doubled by the Amen of all the people who listened to it. Now what has become of that prayer? Can such eloquence be lost? Will even the wind itself care nothing for it—or will it keep it as music, and breathe it upon the coming days, to tell them what did happen in the brightest hours of the Israelitish history? Do such events go for nothing? Do such prayers perish in the air? Lay the emphasis upon the word *such*. Do not speak merely of prayers, because that sacred word may be so coldly spoken as to be deprived of all spirit, fire, impulse, and vital meaning; but *such* prayer—so complete in its range, so exquisite in its expression, so sympathetic in its whole spirit. If that can be lost, it is useless to talk about immortality; for this prayer *is* the soul, and if it be can lost—burst into air and nothingness—then immortality

is but a phrase, and the hope of it a wild man's dream. It is in vain to talk about the immortality of the soul if what the soul does be wholly mortal: if its noblest thoughts, its finest poetry, its loftiest aspirations, its sweetest charities all go for nothing: what a mockery to the soul itself that it shall keep beating and throbbing on while all the beating and throbbing must end in nothingness! We argue the immortality of the soul from what may be termed the necessary immortality of all goodness, brightness, music, vital affection, and sacrificial sympathy.

What became of the prayer? Read the third verse: "And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me." The man who offered such a prayer was not likely to turn immediately to the practice of lying. There are some things we cannot believe. Who could think, after having heard the great prayer, that no sooner had the Amen died from the quivering lip than that same lip gave hospitality to falsehood, began to tell lies, and to bear iniquitous testimony in the face and hearing of the people? We have, then, this point to deal with, and it is not a light point. If we deny the prayer, we must not make the suppliant himself a liar. He thinks he was answered: he says he was answered; he gives the words of the answer. It is injustice, therefore, to treat all this as so much verbiage, or to charge a perverted imagination upon the man who uttered this prayer. If the prayer had not been before us it would have been easier to charge Solomon with a species of fanatical spiritual extravagance: but unfortunately for the hostile critic the prayer itself is here, open to intellectual and literary inquiry, as well as to spiritual and religious inquest; and our contention is that the man who could utter such a prayer could not turn round from the altar and say he had received what had never been bestowed upon him. We have personal testimony, therefore, in the instance of Solomon to the truthfulness of the doctrine that prayer is answered. Nor does the personal testimony lie in the remote region of ancient history alone. It is the testimony of men to-day. They feel by the warmth of the soul that the sun has not been far away; they feel by the enlargement and sweetening of charity that they have touched at least the hem of the Saviour's garment; they

know by the dissolving of the cloud, the clearing-up of the perplexity, and the new gladness in the soul, that some communication has come from heaven. This is our testimony and we abide by it; we live in it. If we had not this testimony we could not pray again, for our life is too precious to ourselves to be wasted in an eternal process of doing nothing. The answer of one prayer is the inspiration of another. Christians should be more positive and definite with regard to this matter of prayer. They should bear their testimony less hesitantly; nay, they should bear it more gratefully, not with any audacity or boasting, but with simpicity, and with a sense of what is due to him who has communicated to the heart assurances and comforts which have made that heart strong.

Was the answer worthy of God? We reply: It was a great answer, and, therefore, was by so much worthy of him who "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Solomon had desired in this prayer (see chap. viii. 52) "that thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant." Solomon desired that God's eyes might be upon the temple. What does God reply? He says, "Mine eyes shall be there perpetually." But that is simply covering the line of the prayer, and not extending that line by one point. Then look again; for we must have omitted somewhat in our quotation—"Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually" (v. 3). Solomon asked for observation: God promised the presence of His heart: his love should glow in the place; his heart should be rendered available to the uses of the people. A sanctuary without a heart! what is it but a gilded sepulchre? What men want in the sanctuary is God's heart—that great love-presence, that holy love-inspiration, that peculiar sympathy which touches human life at every point, and fills the house with a sense of impartiality as if all might equally enjoy according to individual capacity the love and light and help which come from heaven. When we are called upon, then, to bear testimony to answered prayer, we must not allow ourselves to be limited by these terms. If God *merely* answered prayer, then in some sort would our minds be equal to God's mind; for we had measured exactly the capacity and precisely the blessing required for the occasion. God never

under-answers his people: it is a denial full of love, or an answer which surprises the receiver by its redundance of blessing.

Does the answer end with the third verse? Was the transaction so easy—a great prayer and a generous reply without detail? The answer proceeds much further: it was a conditional reply. Hear these modifying and guarding words:—"And if thou wilt walk before me" (v. 4); "But if ye shall at all turn from following me" (v. 6). This is sad; yet it gives one deepening confidence in the answer itself. Even from the modifications of the reply we may argue the solidity and significance of the answer. The very cautions may be so interpreted as to leave no doubt about the reality. Thus it is great life comes; thus it is that liberty is limited, and becomes, as we have ever seen in these studies, only liberty to obey. God's promises are hinged upon explicit conditions. Ye have not because ye ask not, or because ye ask amiss. And the lightnings cannot run so quickly as God's thoughts run, and as God's judgments find their way upon the earth amongst the children of men; if, between offering the prayer and receiving the answer, we have had one contrary thought, one unholy impulse, or have done one unworthy deed, the message may be spoiled even in the course of its transmission from heaven, and may come down upon us like a dagger, or like a blast of fire, scorching the men it was intended to bless. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Did the matter end even there? God would surely terminate his communication with a caution rather than with a judgment? No: "Then will I cut off Israel." (v. 7.) It is like cutting off his right hand; but he will do it! Read the awful words in an appropriate tone—"Then will I cut off Israel," a tone full of reluctance, pathos, heartbreak. He would rather shut up the constellations, and turn back the sun; but he will do it! He cannot afford to do otherwise. The universe without righteousness is a contradiction in terms. There must be law at the head of things and the heart of things. Our security is in this very spirit of judgment. We tremble before it, and wonder why God cannot mitigate the severity of his judgment, forgetting that the

severity of God is as the rock which underlies the soil on which the flowers bloom. Nor does the matter end here. The temple itself shall go for nothing when Israel turns away from God. We have seen the great pile—great, not in dimensions, but in costliness and value—rising course by course; we have seen cedar wood overlaid with gold; we have seen the hinges of the doors to be of gold, and the lamp, and the bowl, and the spoons, and the snuffers to be all of gold: we have seen the temple on Mount Moriah, a high place, seen from afar. God will love the temple whatever the people may do? No: "And at this house, which is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss" (v. 8). The house is nothing if the child be wrong. Home is "sweet home" no more when the hearts that make it are perverted and full of bitterness. Write Ichabod upon the house, for God hath forsaken his temple when the people who inhabit it have turned away from his commandments and followed inventions and impulses of their own. Think of the temple being hissed at; men wagging their heads as they pass by it, and calling it by contemptuous names, saying, "Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and served them: therefore hath the Lord brought upon them all this evil" (v. 9). So it shall be with our professions. The very greatness of our services shall be the measure of the contempt which is poured upon us in the day of our unfaithfulness. Evil spirits will laugh and say, "Ha, ha! hast thou become one of us? Thou wast son of the morning, favourite of the stars, brightest of the Pleiades,—hast thou left thy place and fallen down into our society?" To be mocked by our own prayers, to be taunted by our own professions, to be reminded of the days when our orthodoxy was without a speck, and then to be compelled to contrast our present selves, apostate and lost, with our former selves, when we held the key of heaven's door and could pray the day long and receive replies from God,—say, is there any torture keener, any anguish more exquisite, any hell so hot?

We have before us, then, the solemn lesson that it is possible to spoil our prayers by our disobedience. Whilst this is a

solemn lesson, it is also one that is full of solid spiritual comfort. The universe is watched at both ends. There is no neglected spot in all the sanctuary; there is no corner consecrated to evil; the light smites every angle and fills the whole impartially. We cannot live upon public prayer, or Israel never could have died after the prayer of Solomon. That prayer was in itself a history, and seemed to fill up all that was needful once for all in the whole life of the people. But every man must pray for himself. It is good and profitable to hear the public prayer, to enjoy all the stimulus and comfort of Christian sympathy, and to know the confidence and warmth of spiritual masonry; but when the public prayer is said, each man must utter his own prayer, in his own way, according to his own pain and need; and God will communicate an answer to every suppliant. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. We cannot tell in open words and audible sounds all we want to say to God. Blessed be his name, he has been so condescending as to say, through Jesus Christ his Son, "When thou prayest"—poor bruised heart, poor needy soul, ineloquent man, short of words, but feeling deeply—"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret"—just in thine own way, brokenly, lispingly, feebly, self-correctingly, advancing so far into a sentence, and then withdrawing to amend it or abolish it or replace it; but in the secret closet have it out between yourselves —you and God—and stop there till you get the answer.

We cannot live upon a prayer—that is, an individual and specific prayer; but we are to live in the spirit of prayer. There is all the difference in the world between these two conditions. A prayer—that is, a single and particular prayer—may be an utterance once for all. Occasional prayer is not prayer. Perhaps we have not sufficiently considered that solid and vital doctrine. We cannot say to ourselves, Now we will at this particular time pray; and then allow a long time to elapse and probably pray again. That is not prayer at all. To neglect God, to have no commerce with heaven, until the darkness is intolerable, and the pain can no longer be borne, and the sense of loss creates a void in the life without width or depth that can be measured, and then to cry mightily for the divine pity, is not prayer; it has no rela-

tion to prayer; it must not be imported into the discussion of the utility or answerableness of prayer; it is a blot upon the religious imagination, and it is an irony in the exercise of the religious conscience. What then are we to do? We are to pray "without ceasing,"—that is, we are not only to pray, but to be prayers, to live our supplications, to breathe them always—not audibly, but in an undertone, in a secret whisper; we are to touch nothing with hands that have not first been lifted up to heaven. Then say whether prayer will not be answered! We have quarrels or controversies about the answers, when we ought to have had severe and unsparing inquest into the prayers themselves. Why contend about the reply, when we are not sure about the thing to which the reply was given? When we are in doubt about the answers given to prayer, let us change the point of doubt and fix it in our own prayers themselves, and say with profitable frankness to our own souls, The prayer was bad; the prayer was selfish; the prayer was not offered in the right name, the prayer was not baptised with the sacrificial blood of the Son of God; the prayer was an effort in words, it was not the sacrifice of a humble, meek, lowly, contrite heart. Fix the attention of men on that point, and the whole atmosphere of the controversy will be changed; and instead of wrangling in words, we shall be bowed down in self-accusation and self-judgment, and say, "We have not, because we have asked amiss."

PRAYER.

Almighty God, thou dost answer the prayer of the heart, and put to rest the soul that would know thee through Jesus Christ thy Son—the sweet rest of conscious pardon, the glad rest of celestial hope, whereby we overcome all the tumult of the present excited time and already enjoy the calm of thine own heavens. Thou hast great blessings to give. All thy blessings are great. When our need is large and acute, then how wondrous is thy reply to the desire of the soul! Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask or think. When we have beheld somewhat of thy glory, we exclaim with wonder and thankfulness, The half had not been told us! We thank God the half never can be told, nor any part of it: so large is the whole that any part of it is as nothing. Behold, to this high estate hast thou called us, to this inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. We bless thee for thy riches, O Christ; they are unsearchable riches. Thine is the wealth of eternity, thine the precious treasure of heaven; and out of thine abundant fulness thou dost give grace for grace, grace upon grace; and thou dost challenge us, so that we may bring an offering unto thine house and prove thee, that thou mayest open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing until there shall not be room to receive it. We rejoice that we come to a king with our prayers. They are answered by the very fact of thy listening: when thou dost incline thine ear, thou dost also extend thine hand. What men need thou knowest. All the wordless questions of the heart thou understandest. What we would say if we could, thou dost know. All our wonder and doubt, all our shame and fear, all our trust and hope,—behold, are not all these before thee in the clear daylight? and surely when we come thus in the name of Jesus, Name above every name, thou wilt grant us answers that will make us glad, thou wilt give us communications which will make us solemn and thankful. Thou knowest what each most needs, and no man can interpret his brother's sorrow in all its depth and tenderness: the heart knoweth its own bitterness. We beseech thee, therefore, to read what we cannot speak, to interpret the mystery for which there are no words we dare pronounce aloud; and thus give us secret communications from heaven, blessed messages from the healing skies, sweet gospels from the uplifting cross: then we shall be rich, and strong, and young, and glad, triumphing even whilst fighting, and standing in heaven, even whilst praying upon the earth. We would see Jesus; we would behold the Lamb of God; we would have our vision fixed upon him who is the Saviour of the world, and would be able by the anointing of the Holy Spirit to read the mystery of his pain, the secret of his blood-

shedding, the marvel of his sacrifice. Whilst we look upon the Dying One, may the earth reel, and rocks rend, and may veils which separate men be torn down, and may all this great darkness prepare for heaven's morning. Amen.

1 Kings x. 1-9.

1. And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions.
2. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.
3. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not.
4. And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built,
5. And the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord; there was no more spirit in her.
6. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom.
7. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard.
8. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom.
9. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.

THE queen of Sheba was an earnest inquirer. She was not content with the reports which she had heard in her own land; she bethought her that she would put to the test this man of marvellous wisdom, whose gifts of expression, both in speech and in song, were unrivalled. She thought she knew something which even he could not answer. She would have her own questions put in her own way. That is what every earnest inquirer must insist upon. No man can ask another man's questions. Every man must put his inquiries, his doubts, and his desires, precisely in his own tone, and must himself listen to the replies which are returned. The inquiry is never the same; in substance it may be identical, but in spirit, in tone, in quality, there is always a critical point and measure of difference, which

every man realises for himself, and must insist upon making clear to the person to whom his inquiries are addressed. The queen of Sheba was herein a model inquirer. She said in effect: I will go and state my case, and see this man face to face, and talk over all the great problems which make life so painful—so little, yet so great, so glorious and so full of hope. She came a long way to see Solomon. She travelled northward, mile by mile, day by day; and the miles seemed nothing, and the days flew away, because her heart was full of a great hope that at last she would receive solutions to problems which had filled her with the spirit of unrest. She put herself to trouble on her own spiritual account. Therefore she became a prepared listener. Persons who do not put themselves to trouble in order to have their case stated and considered are not in a fit position to receive communications from heaven. We must not be mere receivers; we must be suppliants intensely interested in our own prayers, and so enriched with patience and with the grace of rational expectation, that God may see us in a waiting posture, and know that we are tarrying until the door open, or the answer in some way come. There would be more Solomons if there were more queens Sheba: there would be greater preachers if there were greater hearers. A great revival must now take place in the pew. The pulpit was never so occupied as it is in every communion this day: never had it such learning, such spirituality, such power and force of every quality and degree. But the pew is a divided quantity: it seems to be listening to a thousand voices all at once, and therefore not listening to any of them. The pew requires intensity of attention, consciousness of deep spiritual necessity, and requires to have, as it were, written upon it the demand that whosoever addresses it should speak as under a baptism of fire.

The queen of Sheba represented the common desire of the world. The interview with the king was long-continued and marked by supreme confidence.—"She communed with him of all that was in her heart" (v. 2). How then could he but answer her questions? She half-answered them herself by her way of putting them. He sowed the seed on a prepared soil. He felt that he was in vital communication with a living soul—a

listener who heard not only every word but every tone, and knew the spiritual value of the music which was being poured into the listening ear. We nowadays cannot get at people's hearts. Civilisation has lent new resources to hypocrisy. We now put questions merely for the sake of putting them, and to such questions kind heaven is dumb. Jesus Christ answered some people "never a word." He looked dumb. They were not speaking of what was in their hearts. Given a hearer who will tell the speaker all that is in his heart, and behold Jesus himself will draw nigh, and, beginning at Moses, he will pursue his way through prophets and minstrels and all writers, until the listening heart glows with a warmth hitherto unknown. Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ask, and receive! Is asking an exercise of the lips, a mere putting of phrases into an interrogative form? Asking is crying, demanding, beseeching, supplicating, weeping. Who has asked? We ask not until we reach the point of sacrifice. It is when the heart is in high agony that it prays; at other times it merely mutters to itself. What we want, then, is heart to heart communication. The great questions are in the heart. We have falsely supposed that great inquiries concerned the intellect alone, but when we come into a completer and truer analysis, we shall find that the great questions lie within the moral region, and are really affairs of the heart. Let the heart speak its doubts and fears, tell its tale of perverseness, selfishness, littleness, relate all that is in its secret places, and force itself to put into words things that shame the heavens; then we shall see whether the gospel leaves unanswered the great questions of the soul. But the gospel will not be trifled with. It will not be turned into a plaything. It will not condescend to be consulted as an oracle, to be used as a convenience for the gratification of intellectual desire or anxiety; it has a message to the heart: it stands at the heart, and knocks. Ye have not, because ye ask not! Your prayer was swift, shallow, an effort in words; you sweltered not in blood when you spake the poor prayer.

The queen of Sheba saw with a trained eye that the accessories were in keeping with the central dignity: "And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he

had built, and the meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord——" (vv. 4, 5). This was fair reasoning. We may reason from within, and say: Given such a spiritual state, and such and such accessories may reasonably be looked for. Or we may reason from without, and say: If God so cared for oxen, what will he do for men? If God so paint the lily, how will he beautify the soul? If God has lavished infinite wisdom and strength on the grass blade, what can he have done for all heaven? Men are at liberty to begin their reasoning from either of these points—namely, the inward, or the outward. Some cannot begin from the point that is within: for they have no experience that would warrant their assuming the right to reason from such an origin; but the open Bible is accessible to all men —namely, the open bible of nature, life, and the whole scheme of providence. Jesus Christ often trained his disciples to reason from the point that was external. When their faith was going down, he did not deliver long metaphysical lectures upon faith and upon the culture of the soul, because his scholars could not follow him in such high argument, but he said, "Behold the fowls of the air: consider the lilies: are not ye better than they? Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field——" and from that point he reasoned inward, until those who understood his reasoning felt themselves clothed upon with their house from heaven. The reasoning remains the same to-day in all its broadest effects. In some cases we are struck by the spiritual wisdom of men. They have intellectual penetration, moral sagacity—that keen, swift sympathy which understands without being told, which sees the prodigal whilst he is "yet a great way off;" they are seers and prophets, and men whose very voice may be an inspiration, and whose very touch may be the beginning of recreated strength. Others, again, can only judge the gospel by providence. Jesus Christ takes care to assure those who are concerned in his kingdom that God does not forget the outward. He says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things"—lumping them, reducing them to a contemptible "etc."—"all these things shall be added unto you. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of

these things." So we reason from the care of the body to the care of the soul; and we are entitled to reason from his making of the world, and his governing thereof, to what he will do in all spiritual spaces, liberties, and processes. Take his world, and make that the beginning of your reasoning, and you will be compelled by a gracious necessity to acknowledge that he who has made even this little world we call the earth, must have made something larger and better: for there is enough in the very beginning to force the conclusion that it is but a beginning. Has God lavished all his strength upon the grass-blade, upon the daisy of the field, upon the fowl of the air? or has he made these but points of beginning, seizing which, we are struck with amazement, and the amazement becomes another point of ascent, and every new wonder is turned into a new question, and so the soul is cultured by gracious and gradual processes.

How very vividly the queen of Sheba represented faith as over-taxed—"Howbeit I believed not the words" (v. 7)—"I loved to hear them, but they were too much for me; it seemed to me impossible that any man should have reached this height of wisdom, or realised this extent of excellence; I tell thee, Solomon, the reports staggered my reason and simply overwhelmed my faith." No wonder. And herein we should be gentle to those who on hearing the gospel, say, "How can these things be? Whence hath this man this wisdom? Never man spake like this Man!" The gospel must stagger men before it really lays hold of their deepeet confidence, and turns them heavenward—Godward. If we have delivered the gospel so as to produce the impression that it is very simple, easy, superficial, a message which any child might have conceived, or which a person who is half awake might deliver, what wonder if the age has said: We have no time for gospels of that quality: give us fire, life! When the gospel is preached, credulity should arise and say, No: I can believe much, but I cannot believe that on first hearing: that God should die, that life should come through death, that sin can only be obliterated by blood; that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life—nay, the whole world is not worth it;

it is a little mean world, and God never loved it so. There is a passion of unbelief which is not to be resented. Men who deliver themselves in this strain of doubt are at least earnest men, and therefore may be talked to, reasoned with, prayed over. Have faith in men who are staggered by the greatness of the gospel. It is well they should be so. If we could see the heavens as they are at night, who dare go out? Should we not be driven mad by splendour so infinite? Thus God concealeth matters. It is the glory of God to conceal things, or to reveal them little by little, as we are able to hear them; it is his own method, and it is suited to the naked eye. God hath made his universe for the naked eye. So things are atmosphered, attempered, measured as to proportion and relation, and all the while he keeps the whole matter in his own hand, giving as we are able to receive it. The queen of Sheba, with sweet and gracious simplicity, frankly exclaimed, "I believe not;" and will Christ be angry with us if we say to him sometimes, "Lord Jesus, I believed not; the glory was so great, the revelation so grand, that my faith simply reeled and was of no use to me; that thou didst bleed and die for men—Lord, I did not believe; I said, 'Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?' Lord, I did not believe"? Will he not in reply to that confession rather look upon us benignantly and say, No wonder, into these things the angels desire to look; no wonder, all heaven was surprised when the revelation was made there; no wonder, for the first archangel cannot touch this mystery of love. There is a nonbelief which may hereafter throw into glorious contrast the faith by which we are saved.

But the queen of Sheba also showed that imagination was overborne by fact: "Behold," said she, "the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard" (v. 7.) Here is truth again. This woman is true from the beginning of the interview unto the end. And all that Christ asks of us is to be true, and in our own way to say what we have seen him do, and especially what we have seen him do for ourselves. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which

God hath prepared for them that love him." Interpret these words as we may—of distant heaven, or of spiritual revelation and communion—there remains the fact that they represent a quantity, a light, a marvel beyond the ken of human wisdom, far away from the line that is beaten by imagination's strongest wing. We must acknowledge all these things plainly, and tell men that religion, instead of being less than we supposed it to be, is, in Christ Jesus, the supreme marvel, without beginning and without end. There is no searching of Christ's understanding; his riches are unsearchable: the more he gives, the more he seems to have to give. It is a great mystery, and must be acknowledged as such, and proclaimed as such with unfaltering tongue.

Nor could the queen of Sheba limit her commendation and ecstasy to the king himself. Said she, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom" (v. 8). O to be a servant of thine, king Solomon; to be permitted sometimes to overhear thy conversation, to catch even a stray word now and then! "Happy are these thy servants;" they must often listen when they do not seem to be listening; they must serve thee with both hands earnestly, because they get back from thee such gleams of light, such words of revelation and soothing as men never heard before. And is the servant of Christ unblessed? Are they who are humblest and lowliest in all the Church without benefaction? Nay, do they not all live in the sunshine and eat at the hospitable table of God's own summer? Is there a servant of Christ who has not a heaven of his own? We should be happier if we knew our privileges more. It is an awful thing to have outlived Christian privilege. It is a sad thing to imagine that we have outgrown our teachers, and have no further need of their assistance: then indeed the teachers can do no mighty works, because of the unbelief of the learners. Who would not give much to have one long day with the Apostle Paul? Yet he was stoned whilst he lived; he was persecuted unto the death. Who would not wish to have one long day with Martin Luther? Yet the men of his age did not understand him, nor care for his great messages. Who would not love to have one whole summer day, the longest in the year, with Frederick William Robertson, of

Brighton, the greatest teacher of his day, the child-man, the man all but angel, with so little of the body and so much of the spirit, who interpreted the Bible in the very act of reading it? Yet who knew him or cared for him beyond a limited circle of devotees who felt that his speech was music, and that his sentences were fountains of living water? Who knows but the very lowliest in the Church may be those who derive most benefit from the privileges of the sanctuary? There are privileges even yet in the house of God. It is a privilege to hear some men pray, to hear some men read the Scriptures, to hear some men unfold the sacred message; and yet they may be listened to without attention, and their message may seem to have upon it no brightness other than earthly. The time shall come when men will know that a prophet hath been amongst them.

What use did Jesus Christ make of this incident of the visit of the queen of Sheba? We find an answer in Matt. xii. 42:—"The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." She was drawn by a strange magnetism. The queen of Sheba was of the Semitic race, and was not therefore wholly alien from the seed of Abraham: and who can tell how the principle of heredity works in souls, and draws them in this direction or in that, and enables them to sustain great cost of time and strength and money in order to reach the culmination of their spiritual desires? "A greater than Solomon": he answers greater questions, he distributes greater blessings, he reigns in more glorious state. When he sees Solomon in all his grandeur—sees the man who made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers—when he beholds this great Solomon, he takes up a blade of grass, and plucks a flower of the field, and says, "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." When a man can so interpret nature, he never can be poor, and he never can be alone.

1 Kings xi. 1-13.

1. But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites;

2. Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

3. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.

4. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

5. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

6. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.

7. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

8. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

9. ¶ And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice.

10. And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded.

11. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

12. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.

13. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen.

SOLOMON'S BACKSLIDING.

IN looking at the fact that "king Solomon loved many strange women," the emphasis must be laid to a considerable extent upon the word "strange." It was not the polygamy that was

condemned in the Old Testament, but in this instance there was more than polygamy, there was an outgoing after foreign political alliances, which might be turned destructively against the theocratic idea which God had never allowed to fall into abeyance in Israel. The Zidonians and the Hittites, who are particularly mentioned as amongst the women whom Solomon loved, belonged to the old Canaanitish race, and in following after them Solomon was distinctly violating one of the solemn compacts under which the kingdom was held. The notices which are repeatedly given of Solomon's accumulation of silver and gold, his multiplication of horses and his multiplication of wives, remind us of the law which was distinctly laid down in Deut. xvii. 16, 17:—"But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold."

It is not impossible that Solomon gave licence to what may be called his religious imagination when he brought together within his view all the various gods represented by the nationalities which are named. He seems to have entered into that state of mind which can complacently contemplate all forms of faith and worship, and regard each with an amount of toleration which really signifies the abandonment of his own original faith, or such a modification of it as to deplete it of all active value. We know that there is a subtle temptation operating in this direction in all our minds. Sitting at our ease in some palace of our own building, we look around and muse contemplatively, wondering at the variety of gods which the world presents, and gradually coming to think that perhaps the multiplication of gods, is after all a kind of necessity of the human heart; we think that one faith ought to be tolerated as well as another; we consider that temperament, and climate, and antecedents of all kinds, such as methods of bringing-up and general culture, all tell in the formation of the religious instinct, and that the gratification of that instinct by a multiplicity of gods is after all not so harmful as it might under some circumstances appear to be. Thus we muse ourselves out of our original faith, which was so strong and valiant, and which

at one time could show no toleration towards unbelief, or misbelief, or perverted belief of any kind. After all there is a kind of melancholy sequence in what we find in the history of Solomon. He had much gold and silver: he was the greatest of the kings of the earth; he had a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen; he made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as the sycamore trees that are in the vale, for abundance; he had horses brought out of Egypt, and linen yarn; a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and an horse for an hundred and fifty: and so for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Syria, did they bring them out by their means; with kings for vassals, with armies at his disposal, with many strange women in his harem, with all things flourishing round about him, who can wonder that Solomon began to look upon all forms of worship as probably having something in them more or less worthy of complacency, and came in some way to add even these to the riches of his boundless kingdom?

We may be quite certain that all processes of this kind come to one of two ends: either outward pomp conquers religious conviction, or religious conviction sanctifies worldly pomp, taking out of it all harmfulness, and turning it to necessary conveniences and uses. In the case of Solomon, worldly pomp seems, for a time at least, to have dominated his mind. The idea seems to have occurred to him, why not be magnificent in "gods" as well as in horses and in chariots? A man who had everything that heart could wish, might surely, so he reasoned, permit himself to add any number of gods to his pantheon, and, in indulging this imagination, he might even suppose that so strong was he in his own faith that he could control all these gods, and make them merely decorative of great central verities. Again we see how easy it is having broken one of the commandments to break the whole. Turning to the law as written in Deuteronomy, we find it very distinctly stated: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly" (vii. 3, 4); and again in the same book we read,

"neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away." Having broken these laws, Solomon proceeded to displace other ordinances in Israel. Beware the beginning of error; he that offends in one point is guilty of all; not necessarily in the matter of detailed infraction, as if he had voluntarily destroyed the commandments one by one, but in the spirit of destruction he is guilty of all. We break all the commandments when we break the spirit of the law. If we suppose that the universe is a mere affair of commandments, or literal ordinances, and that they are to be counted one by one and dealt with in their singularity, it will be no wonder if we come to reckon ourselves virtuous "upon the whole," or as "in the main" not worthy of condemnation: we shall establish the principle of majorities in estimating our moral standing, saying, that having kept nine out of ten of the commandments we ought to be regarded as nine-tenths good. That is not the conception of the universe which is formed in the Bible, or the conception on which Jesus Christ proceeded in revealing the kingdom of heaven. The law is either kept or broken by the spirit. It is not *a* law that is kept, or *a* law that is broken, but *the* law that is offended and dishonoured. The law is essentially a whole, though it may come to us in enumerated details for the sake of meeting our capacity and our moral decrepitude.

We read that when Solomon was "old" all this terrible collapse took place. By the word "old" we are not to understand merely age in years; the word rather points to the advance of life, and indicates something that was done at the end rather than at the beginning of the man's existence. We have already raised the inquiry whether all the buds which made Solomon's young character so beautiful would ever come to maturity and fruition. We wondered whether the bad element or the good in him would at last predominate. Now we come to a very melancholy reply to this inquiry. Experience, which ought to be so much security against temptation, actually became a kind of open door through which all manner of strange views and imaginations entered and took possession of Solomon's mind. Or did the man grow weak as he grew old? Or is the word "old" put in partly to excuse the spiritual decay? Is there a subtle intention to imply that if Solomon had not become infirm

with years he never would have yielded to the temptation of his idolatrous wives? Does the word "old" so change the tenor of the text that it may be read thus: Solomon having lost his early mental vigour, or having become weary with the vain experiences of life, or having seen an end to all things under the sun, little cared what happened to him; this decay, therefore, must not be traced to any voluntary action on his own part, but must be rather regarded as an excuse for what would seem to be a shameful apostasy? We cannot consent to have the text read thus; otherwise it might appear at least to give us licence to follow in the same lines. No. We must insist upon it that as a man grows old he should grow wise; that as he advances in years he should consolidate in faith; and at the end should have become master of himself and of his circumstances, and worthily represent the spiritual education under which God has caused him to pass.

Notice various suggestive expressions in the course of this narrative. For example, in v. 4 we read, "His wives turned away his heart"; and again, "his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God"; in v. 6 we read, he "went not fully after the Lord"; and in v. 9 we find the expression, "his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel." Observe that the action always takes place in the heart. His heart was "turned away," "not perfect," and again his "heart was turned." Read these words over and over again, because they are melancholy words and have a distinct application to all ages. Who can follow the heart in all its deceitful turnings, and understand all that it has given up in its own secret recesses of the faith which once found there a sanctuary? Outwardly there may be no sign of surrender or decay. The same church may be attended, the same books read, the same characters reverenced, and to all appearances the same life may be lived. But "as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." What has taken place in that chamber of imagery? How are its walls painted with idols? What festivals to unholy deities are kept up in that banqueting-chamber? "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." "My, son, keep thine heart; for out of it are the issues of life." A decay of love generally precedes a decay of faith. Once let love be banished from the heart, and it

will be easy to displace conviction from the mind. Hence the call which is continually addressed to Christians to be vigilant, and to be sober; to be on the outlook for their adversary who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; to gird up the loins of their minds; to put on the whole armour of God, and to watch wakefully, because they know not at what hour the strong man may come to spoil the home of the soul.

O thou who hast made the heart so complex, and hast opened a thousand ways into its innermost places, and hast set us in a great sphere of trial and discipline and temptation, do thou enable us so to watch that we may see the enemy whilst yet he is a great way off, and give us that keen sensitiveness to all sin which instantly realises its remotest approach, and resents the proposed incoming of the enemy. Take not thy Holy Spirit from us! Give us the tender delicacy which knows all that the enemy means to do with us; and above all give us that firm reliance upon thyself which will enable us to answer the enemy with indignation, and with all the passion of consecrated and eternal love.

Notice the divine action as it is outlined in this matter. "And the Lord was angry" (v. 9). "I will surely rend the kingdom from thee" (v. 11). God could not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. God is angry with the wicked every day. God is not an uninterested spectator of the action of kings, churches, and families; his eye is constantly not only upon the universe as a whole, but upon everything in it which bears his name and which ought to represent his purity. He burns like a furnace against all iniquity; but is he not like a furnace seven times heated when the iniquity is found in high places, when it is clothed with the purple of the throne, and when it wields the resources of a kingdom? God is angry with every man who departs from the faith; but is not his anger kindled to intolerable fury when the departure is found in one who has ministered at his altar, or who has publicly avowed the name and honour of Jesus Christ? Where much has been given much has been required. The city set on a hill cannot avail itself of the excuses which might at least momentarily be tolerated in the case of a city buried in the valley. Here the lesson comes to all priests, kings, statesmen, ministers, teachers, journalists, heads of houses, and leaders of public sentiment. Nor is God's anger to be

regarded as a mere expression of sentiment; it leads to the tearing-down of authority, and to the replacing of the kingdom in other hands. A man will feel his influence departing from him; churches will be impoverished; institutions that were once vigorous, and that answered the hunger of the age with abundant hospitality, will feel that their resources are being contracted, their vigour is being dried up; nor may it at once appear why these things are so; for a time even mystery may gather around them, but at length it will be made manifest that all this decay of influence, and all this contraction of activity and usefulness, must be traced to what has happened in the hearts of men who once made themselves felt for good in wide social circles. When public influence wanes, inquire whether it be not because the heart is not perfect with God. When the right hand forgets its cunning, and the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth, and there is no more skill in the faculties of the mind, fall down in penitential submission, and see whether it be not because the heart does not go fully after God, but has given up part of its love to deities whose very names are hateful to heaven.

Yet the action of the Almighty is compassionate as well as angry, for in v. 12 we read, "Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son." Even here the past plays a restraining part in the present, and even here the future is shown to be a controlling agency when rightly apprehended. Men should be careful what they do, even on account of their sons who may yet not be born unto them. What is done to-day may affect the remotest ages of time. How difficult it is for God to give up any whom he has loved; "My lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail;" "I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel." Even whilst in possession of many mercies we may be living under a cloud of judgment. He is a selfish man, and utterly beyond the pale of reasoning, who disregards that cloud simply because it has not to burst upon his own head, but will dissolve in destructive storms upon the heads of those who have to succeed him. Great is the mystery of providence, because great is the mystery of the unity of the human race. The son might well wonder why judgment should

be reserved for him, when he himself was not an active agent in the sin which was judged and punished. But to reason so would be to reason imperfectly and unwisely. If that reasoning is to be adopted it must be carried out to all its consequences, and then we shall certainly be deprived of blessing as much as of judgment: of all the hospitality and beauty of summer as certainly as of all the barrenness and dreariness of winter. The way of the Lord is equal in this matter. We are members one of another. Nowhere in the Christian law is it said that men are unrelated, and that the law of sequence is suspended. Our whole life is part of a process which cannot be reckoned either as to its beginning or its ending.

"Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh." Even the Solomon we have known in connection with the building of the temple! Chemosh was the supreme deity of the Moabites, followed by great numbers in western Asia. The high place that Solomon built was in the hill that is before Jerusalem, which has been identified with Olivet. Even the holiest ground is no longer sacred when once the heart has gone astray. Solomon could have turned the temple itself into a sanctuary of Ashtoreth, or the dwelling-place of Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. This indeed would appear to be wonderful, but it is smaller than many of the wonders that happen within our own experience. Many men are shocked by what they term the profanation of the visible sanctuary who are not shocked by the profanation of the sanctuary of their own hearts. We must break in strongly upon all such superstition. Whilst not excusing what is known as the profanation of times and places, we must put things in their right relations, and not mistake the vital for the temporary, or the temporary for the vital. It is a sad thing to hear unholy words spoken in consecrated places, but it is an infinitely sadder thing for the heart to be going astray silently and secretly after forbidden pleasures. It is the heart that wanders. When once that wandering takes place, no locality is sacred, no name is sanctified, no time is redeemed from common uses: the whole life has gone down in quantity, in purity, and in value.

PRAYER.

Almighty God, destroy in us whatever would prevent our receiving thy truth and acting upon thine instructions, and lead us into a spirit of obedience, and inspire us with all the loyalty of unquestioning and unreserved love. We have opinions and theories of our own: thereby do we prove ourselves only half divine—we assert them in angry controversy and contend for them with much fury, not knowing that we know nothing, that our ancestry is of yesterday, and that to-morrow we are gone. Help us to recognise our own littleness and poverty, and to look away unto the great God and the everlasting wealth, that we may be made great in divine grandeur and rich with the riches of Christ.

We bless thee for thy word, which is so true to our own history, which wrote our lives before we breathed, which anticipates all the courses of our life and indicates the issue of all things. It is great reading, it is a sweet gospel, it is a wondrous drama; behold, everything is in thy book; open our eyes that we may see wondrous things out of thy law, and open our understandings that we may understand the Scriptures, and especially do thou open our hearts that we may receive thy truth as seed cast into good ground, and may it there abide until it bring forth manifold fruit to the glory and honour of thy name.

We know not what we are: we see occasional flashes of light, and mistake them for abiding glory; we see glimpses of things, but their true proportions and distances we do not recognise nor understand. We see clouds and mistake them for rocks: we cannot tell what is under us; what is above us we do not know: what is round about us is a perpetual challenge and an eternal mystery, and what is in our hearts, behold! Who can sound the depth thereof? We know therefore that we must come unto thee for wisdom, that in thy book alone is our true and final guidance. Help us to renounce ourselves and to put ourselves in the school of Jesus Christ and to learn of him who is meek and lowly in heart.

Let thy blessing come to us as we now severally need. Where there is obduracy of heart, do thou break it with thine hammer: where there are many tears that blind the vision so that it cannot see thyself or the kindness of thy purpose, dry the tears away out of the eye that is consumed thereby, so that the soul may see the Lord and recognise with gladness the way he is taking in our life. Lift the burden from the shoulders that are weary; speak comfortably to those who are besieged by many temptations; give a lesson of wisdom and sobriety to those who are of flippant heart and non-understanding mind; call to those who are afar off that they may come

nigh; and satisfy thy hungry ones and thy poor with bread and with riches from heaven.

Regard us in our individual life, in our family circumstances, in our commercial engagements. Sanctify unto us all bereavements, all the severe visitations of thy rod, and grant that we may be awakened out of our insensibility and be enabled to see that thou art working out a great scheme in life, and may we accept thy working and lovingly trust all thy purpose.

Wash us in the sacred blood, for our sins are many and black. Withhold not the precious stream from our hearts, for nothing else can make us clean. We confess our sin, we are humbled by it and ashamed of it—now let thy mercy magnify itself in the hour of reproach and accusation, so that we may see that thou dost mean well by us and that thy sword is not lifted to destroy. Amen.

1 Kings xi. 14–22.

DIVINE IMPULSES.

THERE was a time when Joab was captain of the whole host of Israel. He, under David and along with the king, had wrought great desolation in the land of Edom. For six months Joab had been using his cruel sword in that country. The end of it was that not a man was left in Edom, not a male could be found within all the limits of the land. That was the bloody purpose of the cruel soldier, and he carried it out with but too complete effect. The king of Edom had a little boy whose name was Hadad, and this little boy ran away in company with some of his father's servants. They took charge of the little exile, and they and he landed in Egypt and sought the protection of Pharaoh. Like to like—the royal Pharaoh took to the royal Hadad; was fond of the boy, and gave him a place in his own house and amongst his own sons. Growing years brought growing favour, and at length Hadad married the sister of Tahpenes, queen of Egypt. A happy ending. A son was born unto Hadad and Genubath, lived in Pharaoh's house, and enjoyed all the privileges of royal offspring.

But one day, to the infinite surprise of Pharaoh, Hadad said to him, "I want to go back to Edom." "Back to Edom?" said the king, "hast thou lacked anything since thou hast been in Egypt?" Hadad said, "Nothing: howbeit, let me go, in any wise." Pharaoh, like a just and honourable man, went back

through the years of his recollection, to find out if he could discover what reason Hadad could have for leaving a hospitable country, a land that had been an asylum to him in the time of his distress and orphanage and helplessness. Hadad soon relieved the king's mind upon all these points: he said, "I have lacked nothing: bread and water, venison and wine, patronage and security—all things have I had in this land of Egypt that heart could desire; howbeit, let me go, in any wise."

Is this an old story that has in it no modern pith or music, or is it our own life anticipated and set in strange lights? Does it require but very little and hardly any skilful handling to put it into relation that we shall ourselves recognise as having a very distinct and instructive bearing upon the development of our own life? Does it not throw some light upon the unexplained restlessness which now and again comes over the spirit of perhaps the quietest man? What is that tugs at the heart and that says, "Come this way?" We are not sitting upon barren rocks, nor are we ploughing inhospitable and unresponding sand: we are in paradise: we have but to touch the ground and it blooms with flowers or teems with luscious fruit. And yet that same invisible hand keeps tugging at the heart, that same weird voice sustains its appeal in the reluctant, wonder-struck and unwilling ear—"Leave the gilded roof, leave the marble floor, leave the loaded table, leave the streams of ruddy or foaming wine; come away, come away." What is it that will not let us alone? I said, "I will die in my nest," and lo, it was torn to pieces. I said, "Now I will find a place on which I can build tabernacles, whereupon I can rest," and lo, in the morning when I came to dig my foundations, I found that I had mistaken bog for rock, and there was no foundation to be dug. "This is all," I have said—"it is more than enough: no longer shall I know the plague of discontent, or feel the urgency of an importunate voice, luring and persuading me almost up to the point of compulsion in this or that direction. My address is fixed, my home is settled, you will always find me here," and lo, in three days men seek for me and I cannot be found, I have been already three days at sea—how is this?

"Wherefore didst thou call me?" said the little priest-boy to

the old priest of Israel; and the old priest said, "My child, this is a delusion: I did not call thee: go and lie down again." "Wherefore didst thou call me?" a second time the question is asked. "My child, I did not call thee—what is the matter with thee, what ails thy mind? Go and lie down again and sleep till the morning, dear one." "Thou didst call me—wherefore?" Then Eli perceived that the Lord had spoken to the child. At last. The religious thought is always the last that occurs to pachydermous insensate brains. O that we were wise, that we were more morally sensitive, that we answered the divine touch more easily and kindly! But we have a knocking, and another knocking, and a third appeal, and then we perceive that this is the Lord's doing. If our minds were in the right mood and temper, the very first idea that would occur to us under extraordinary circumstances would be, Perhaps God is in this.

Take another instance. A surly brother—a younger brother, and this colloquy ensues. "With whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know the pride and naughtiness of thine heart. For to see the fight art thou come down." And David answered and said, "What have I now done? Is there not a cause—an unexplained mysterious cause?" David himself did not know the reason of his being there, in full, but he was wise enough to know that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in any man's philosophy. He always had one side of his life open heavenward. The daily factors that busied themselves in making up his daily life he knew full well—their name, weight, velocity, power of action, relativity, "but," said he, "there is more in life than all this." More than the boy that takes down my shutters in the morning, and the man who keeps my books, and writes my letters: more than debtors and creditors, and customers and clients and appellants of every name—all this I know, but there is something more. The wise man keeps himself open in the direction of that something more. Call it divinity, call it providence, call it mystery, call it fate, call it the immeasurable and the impalpable, or the unknowable, or the inscrutable—what you may—there it is, and until you have got into right relation with that, your life is a mere muddle, a more or less successful trick, but not a planet, centred, poised, im-

movable. You cannot escape the religious element in life; you may shut your eyes, you may close your ears, you may learn the language of earth and the worse language of the pit, and you may exclude all outward religious ministries and appeals, but now and again there is a shaking in the life, a whisper in the ear, a strange quiver in the air, a face at the window, a quantity you cannot name.

Then again, this incident shows us how impossible it is, sometimes, to give reasons for our action. Persons say to the Hadads who come round them, "Why do you leave Egypt?" and Hadad says, "I do not know." O foolish man, are you going back to Edom, the memory of cruelty, shame and agony, without knowing why you are going back?" And poor Hadad can only answer, "Yes." And to the men who can give a reason for everything, Hadad's answer is a reply of insanity. Oh, happy is the man who has never to leave the paved pathway, who knows nothing of the pains of inspiration, the pangs of a high calling, the surprises of a divine election! Yet not so happy, measured by the higher and larger scale; if he misses much pain, he misses much high delight; if he is commonplace on the one side, he is commonplace all through. Is it not better sometimes to be mad with inspiration, though afterwards there be collapse and suffering, than never to feel the divine afflatus, and never to respond to the call of God? Hadad, you must have some reason for going from Egypt—what is it? If you do not give us some reason, we will give you one. You have been behaving badly—do not conceal it—you are going away because of some concealed crime—don't you try to make a good thing out of a bad one; if you do not find reasons, we will find them for you. Poor Hadad can only say, "I cannot tell why I am going—but I must go."

In the fourteenth verse of the chapter in which the narrative is recorded the whole secret is given. The Lord had stirred up the heart of Hadad against wicked Solomon. It was a divine stirring, it was an impulse from heaven, it was the sound of a rushing mighty wind from the skies, a song without words, a ministry without articulation, a movement of the soul. Have you ever been in that case in any degree? I have, and persons have

said to me, "Surely you can give us some reasons for going?" I have said, "Really, I cannot." "Well, but a sensible man always bases his conduct upon reason. Think of it and tell us what your reasons are, and they will relieve our minds, for our anxiety is very painful," and I have only had to say, "I cannot tell you anything more about it, but I must go."

It was a divine stirring. And we often do things in the face of reason. Hadad not only had no reason for going, but he had many reasons for staying, and the action of Hadad, viewed from a strictly human and social point of view, was the action of a madman. It is marvellous how God snubs and rebukes our reason that we are so proud of. We say, "It stands to reason," and God turns our reason upside down. We say, "We must be reasonable," and God does all the greatest actions of the world along a plane that reason never traversed. Why, everything in life seems to contradict reason. Tell me that this earth on which I stand is round—it contradicts my reason. Tell me the earth on which I stand goes round—Goes round? If it went round we should fall off. Tell me that this earth is hung upon nothing—go and tell that in a lunatic asylum, but do not tell it to men whose heads are strong and clear. The whole universe is a mockery of what we call reason. We must enlarge the term; it is not reason that must be despised, but rightly defined, and reason rightly defined has two wings,—hope, faith—now loose her and let her go, and she seeks the gate of the sun. You have ill-used your reason, you have starved the angel, you have shut her up within iron cages and bars, and have drawn your rod across those iron staves and mocked the poor prisoner. Only give your reason fair play, right enlargement, just application, and you will find that reason is the earthly name, and faith the heavenly.

This narrative suggests the inquiry, How am I to know when I am stirred by divine impulses? Some say, "I know that I do feel the stirring, and I want to go and march and to fight, and to conquer—how am I to know when the impulse is divine, and when it is a mere motion of my own will?" I will tell you—yet not I, but the story itself will answer. When the impulse moves you in the direction of loss, pain, and sacrifice, the probability is

that the impulse is divine. Now where is your stirring? Gone. I thought it would go. I have frightened many birds in the same way, and they have flown from the trees on which they had alighted, in chaffering crowds. I will repeat. When the impulse leads you in the direction of self-sacrifice, self-mortification, pain and loss, as it did in the case of Hadad, the probability is that the impulse is divine; but if the impulse moves you in the direction of a fuller cup, a weightier table, a softer bed, a more velvety footing, the probability is that the impulse is not an inspiration of God, but a suggestion of the lower powers. Moses is called—to what? To hardship and difficulty, and much pain, and long provocation in the wilderness. Before him Abraham is called—to what? To a pilgrimage that has a beginning only that he can ascertain: what the explanation and conclusion of it will be he knoweth not: the impulse was divine. Peter was called: "Follow me:" to what? To leave the ship, to leave the nets, to leave friends and kindred, to leave usual avocations and enjoyments, and the call was from God. If we were called to more influential positions, the very first notion that would occur to us would be that the call was a good one. If we were called to a humbler position, and to meaner surroundings, to hardships and pains and difficulties, the devil would say, "Do you suppose God is going to call any man in a direction like that? Nothing of the sort. Stop where you are."

We hear what we want to hear, in the ear. The young woman says, "I feel as if I ought to do it." Do what? You are going to marry a man because he is clever, rich, fine, high, gay, and you a Christian girl? It is no call of God. Resist the devil and he will flee from thee. The young man says, "I feel as if this might be a providential opening." Let me hear what it is and I will tell you at once. "Call to a good position in the city, ten times my present income, position of influence and respectability." What is it to do? "Well, that is—that is the difficulty." Well, I say, what is it to do? "Why, I hardly like to tell you what it is to do." Then don't go; don't go. "But it is ten times the income." Are you sure of that? What is ten times the income? and will not the gold so-called turn to dross as you put it in your purse? Is it not blood money? "Well, if you like

to put it in that way—I do not know—perhaps it may be." I do put it in that way: is it not to live on human misery, on broken hearts? "Well, if you like to put it in that sort of way, why, I dare say it would admit of being so stated." I do state it so: an honest pound a week, an honourable crust, a few odd things in the garret you have paid for, and every one of which will make a place to kneel at for your evening prayer—that, rather than all the riches of Egypt, if you have to forswear one honourable oath, revoke one solemn testimony, or insult one sacred memory.

Then I hear a dear old father-friend: now, what says he? Listen. "Howbeit, let me go, in any wise." Where to, dear father? "To the other country." What other country? "I have a desire to depart." What, to leave the old house at home, with all your children and grandchildren, and the garden, and the library, and the church—you have not a desire to depart, have you? "Yes. O that I had wings like a dove, for then I would flee away and be at rest. My Lord calls me, I must meet him in the promised land." Ay, God sends that homesickness over the heart when he wants to take us up. We begin to say, "I am much obliged to you for all your kindness; you have bestowed favours and honours upon me. God bless you, but —I want to go, to go home, to be at rest; I want to see God's heaven—let me go.

> "'Hark! they whisper: angels say—
> Sister spirit, come away.'

I want to go now. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: I am ready; put in the sickle, cut me down and garner me in heaven."

It is a divine stirring: it is the beginning of immortality.

GENERAL NOTES.

1 Kings xii.

"And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to make him king" (v. 1).

REHOBOAM.

REHOBOAM ("he enlarges the people") was the only son of Solomon. His mother was an Ammonitess called Naamah. He began to reign when he was forty-one years old, and he reigned seventeen years. Why mention his mother? Because destiny is often determined by parentage. Life is not a child's game, played with wooden pieces; its secrets are often deep—lying far back in unexpected places, and flashing out ages afterwards in great surprises. Rehoboam was emphatically his mother's child.

"All Israel were come to Shechem to make him king." Possibly the Ephraimites insisted that he should go to their city to be crowned; possibly it was a clever stroke of policy on the part of Rehoboam: he may have submitted to an apparent indignity to please the vanity of the restless mountaineers; but where God is working out a plan; all our little schemes and aims are drawn into it as the whirlpool sucks all streams and currents into its mighty and terrible sweep.

Shechem, the metropolis among the mountains of Ephraim, lay thirty-four miles north of Jerusalem, and seven miles south of Samaria. Shechem was a city of refuge (Josh. xx. 7)—a centre of union to the tribes (Josh. xxiv. 1, 25). Abimelech had reigned there (Judg. ix.). Abimelech destroyed the city, but it was rebuilt and made the capital of Ephraim. Shechem is now called Nablûs.

When it is said that all Israel went to Shechem, it may mean that delegates representing Israel went to that city. In great

national crises the people speak through their properly qualified representatives. It may have been so in this case.

"And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who was yet in Egypt, heard of it (for he was fled from the presence of king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt)" (v. 2).

Jeroboam, when taken notice of by king Solomon, was the son of a widow (Zeruah), and was exceedingly energetic—a man who could take charge of large works and carry them out with success. Solomon had an eye for capable men, and he selected Jeroboam to superintend the works which he was establishing in his kingdom. Jeroboam was not only a mighty man of valour, but remarkable as being "industrious," and therefore king Solomon made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph (1 Kings xi. 28). Perhaps we think this was honour enough for the son of Nebat, who was one of the king's servants, and the son of "a widow woman." Perhaps Jeroboam thought so too; but men do not fix the bounds of their own habitation, nor determine their own destiny. One day, when Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, a prophet called Ahijah met him, and they two walked alone in the field; and Ahijah took a new garment, rent it into twelve pieces, gave Jeroboam ten of them, and explained to him that he (Jeroboam) would one day be king over Israel. Solomon heard about this, and it made him furious. He sought to kill Jeroboam, and so he who was one day to be a king fled away into Egypt, put himself under the special protection of Shishak, king of that country, and waited there until the death of Solomon. Great destinies are worth waiting for. Many men are now in obscurity who will one day be called to honour and influence. God's promises seem sometimes to be turned upside down, so much so that it is difficult to distinguish them from temptations. What was Jeroboam to think when he was driven from a high position into exile and poverty? Truly he might think that he had been misled by a shadow in the water. But the time of his manifestation was at hand. Jeroboam was in Egypt when Solomon died, but he was in Shechem when the tribes assembled there. It would appear that as soon as he heard of the death of Solomon he returned out of Egypt.

Now that we have all the characters before us we may imagine the scene. Shechem, a city in the mountains of Ephraim; Rehoboam, the son of a king, going up to be acknowledged and crowned; the people ill at ease, yet not unwilling to be loyal to the new king if he will but show himself gracious to them and lessen their burdens; Jeroboam at the head of the deputation, and the following speech made:

"Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee" (v. 4).

Earnest men do not make exaggerated demands. Mere disturbers would have claimed a great deal; they would have said, We must ask much in order to get little; we must demand a thousand if we would get a hundred. But these men were not mere disturbers. They were animated by a patriotic and solemn purpose, and they said neither more nor less than they really meant. True strength does not weaken itself by exaggerations.

"And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me" (v. 5).

This is important, as showing that Rehoboam knew what he was doing. There could be no after-thought of insanity, or no suggestion of having been unduly urged and driven by impulsive people. These short verses in human history are often charged with great meanings.

Now mark what follows as still further confirming this view. Rehoboam consulted with the old men, the veterans who had stood before Solomon his father, and they, as became the dignity of age and the fulness of their experience, gave counsels of conciliation; Meet the people, said they, and they will be thy servants for ever. But Rehoboam turned to the young men, the men who had grown up with him, and they said, Say unto them, My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins, and now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. This answer Rehoboam gave on the third day. We may well ask, How is such insanity to be accounted for? The answer is in the fifteenth verse: "The cause

was from the Lord." He sends men strong delusion that they should believe a lie. He blinds whom he means to destroy. An awful doctrine in one aspect truly, but a very gracious one in another; gracious, because it is infinitely better that all such insanities should be of the Lord's sending and under the Lord's control, that they should be parts of a great scheme ending in mercy, than that the world should be the sport of eccentric minds and its policies and advancements the playthings of idiot rulers. If you ask whether there is not some better way than that taken by the Lord in the case of Rehoboam, I answer, The Lord reigneth, and our wisdom, apparently so excellent, is foolishness before him.

"So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel; now see to thine own house, David" (v. 16).

This is commonly read as a threat of war, but is more critically read as a "a warning against interference." *The Speaker's Commentary* says, The meaning of "Now see to thine house, David," seems to be, Henceforth, house of David, look after thine own tribe, Judah, only.

"But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah' Rehoboam reigned over them" (v. 17).

Now from this time we must make a distinction. Israel will represent the ten seceding or revolting tribes, and Judah will represent those Israelites who acknowledged Rehoboam as king. This is the great division.

"Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem" (v. 18).

Not the home-coming that the king expected. He might have brought back with him the allegiance of the whole nation, instead of that he brought but the small following of Judah and Benjamin. Adoram was probably sent with some offer of better terms. The king had probably seen his mistake and was now willing to concede the demands of the deputies. He would reduce the heavy taxation, or mitigate the forced labour. But it was too late! Beware of this word *too late!* Kings exist for peoples, not peoples for kings.

Ver. 20. When all Israel, *i.e.*, all the people in the most literal sense, and not the delegates only, had heard that Jeroboam was come again, they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. Thus the prophecy was fulfilled. Thus tyranny was broken, and thus a great rent was made in human history.

Now what are the lessons of world-wide importance that are here taught? (1) God is the King of kings; (2) Great power, without great wisdom, becomes tyranny; (3) All divine promises are made conditionally: David's sons did evil, and therefore the kingdom was almost wholly taken from them; (4) Loyalty to kings must bend to loyalty to God; (5) Let nations put their trust in God, and he will work out their deliverance. What is true of nations is true of individuals.

"An ancient French counsellor, being asked by his king to lay down some general rules for government, took a piece of paper, and wrote on the top of it 'moderation,' in the middle of the leaf 'moderation,' and at the bottom 'moderation'"—*Trapp.*

"But he forsook the counsel of the old man, which they had given him" (v. 8).—"It was the custom in different countries to educate with the heir to the throne noblemen of nearly the same age. This answered two great and important ends: (1) it excited the prince to emulation, that he might as far as possible surpass his rivals in age; and (2) that he might acquire a good knowledge of those who were to hold the highest offices under him"—*Adam Clarke.*

"The usurpation of the throne was Jeroboam's first sin, to which he added a second and much greater one immediately after his ascent of the throne—namely, the establishment of an unlawful worship, by which he turned the political division into a religious schism, and a falling away from Jehovah, the God-King of his people"—*Keil.*

"Rehoboam's oppression of the people was a *sin*; yet, you will observe, the people had no right to complain. They had brought this evil on themselves; they had obstinately courted and struggled after it. They would have 'a king like the nations,' a despotic king, and now they had one they were dis-

contented. Samuel had not only earnestly and solemnly protested against this measure, as an offence against their Almighty Governor, but had actually forewarned them of the evils which despotic power would introduce among them."—*Newman.*

1 Kings xii.

"Then Jeroboam built Shechem in Mount Ephraim; and dwelt therein; and went out from thence and built Penuel" (v. 25).

THE SIN OF JEROBOAM.

KINGS must build. The enlargement and decorations of cities is pleasant to subjects. They sometimes mistake building for security, as for example in the case of Jericho.

Jeroboam built Shechem. (See Judges ix. 45.) The meaning is that Jeroboam enlarged and fortified the old capital of Ephraim, which was now to become the royal city of Israel. Antiquity has always been an element of value. No new city could have had the charm of Shechem. How to attach the new to the old has always been a critical problem for all leaders.

Jeroboam also built (restored, completed, fortified) Penuel. The ancient name was Peniel. (See Gen. xxxii. 30.) Penuel was on tolerably high ground, higher at all events than Succoth. It lay on an important route and commanded the fords of Jabbok. (See Judges viii. 17.) Gideon destroyed the fort or tower, and probably Jeroboam rebuilt it. The exact site of Penuel is now unknown.

"And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam, king of Judah" (vv. 26, 27).

It was easier to do the outward work of building, than to do to do the inward work of establishing the loyalty of excited men. This reflection gives an insight into the character Jeroboam. (1) He was far-sighted; (2) he was highly imaginative; (3) he was appalled by the very grandeur of his own success. It began to overweight him. It threw a shadow on the future. Now all

these characteristics are only good so far as they are turned to good purposes. They are amongst the highest qualities or powers, but they may be turned to the ruin of their possessor. Edged instruments sometimes tempt men to commit suicide.

This reflection also throws light upon the new position of Jeroboam; (1) the old might re-assert its supremacy; (2) through the religious emotions political ascendency might be re-established; (3) the people were part of a great whole, and Rehoboam was their lawful king. It will therefore be intensely interesting to find out how a shrewd and powerful man will conduct himself in such a crisis. Here is the answer:—

"Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan" (vv. 28, 29).

There are many lessons arising out of this arrangement, lessons of universal application; let us try to seize some of them.

(1) Here is a distinct oversight of Jeroboam's divine call to the throne.

(2) Here is an attempt to meet earthly difficulties by earthly stratagems. The help of heaven is not invoked. The king took the case wholly into his own hand.

(3) Here is an attempt to pass off the counterfeit for the real,—the two golden calves were set up as God. The religious element in human nature must be provided for. Kings have to consider it. Scientists must not ignore it. Even atheists have to cope with it. These be thy gods,—Money, Nature, Self, Continuity, Development.—It is for the Christian teacher to set up the true God and Saviour of the world.

(4) Here is the distinct abuse of divine providence. Jeroboam was called to the kingdom by the Lord, yet the very first thing he does is to ignore the Lord who called him, and put up two calves of gold in his place. Success ill-used is the ruin of any man. The prosperity which forgets the God who gave it is the greatest calamity of human life. Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked.

(5) Here is an instance of the ease with which discipline is relaxed, and a proof that relaxed discipline leads to the loosening

and deterioration of character. "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem," said the king. An appeal to the weak side of human character.—It is an appeal made to-day; (*a*) you are not fit to go to church; (*b*) it is too far to go; (*c*) the weather is unfavourable. It is easy to set man in downward motion.—When discipline is relaxed, the whole character will easily fall to pieces.

(6) Here is the exact value which Jeroboam put upon the intelligence and dignity of his subjects. He gave them a calf for a god! Refined people will have refined gods. Refined gods will help to make a refined people. In this respect the Christian religion pays the highest tribute to human intelligence. It calls men to a God infinite in every perfection. An argument in support of the Christian religion may be founded on this fact.—Judge a religion by its god.—Judge a people by the kind of god that will satisfy them.—If a calf will do, what must be their intelligence? If nature will do, what must be their emotion? If science will do, what must be their moral sense? If nothing will do, what must be their whole organisation?

On the side of the people there was (1) Utter forgetfulness of the solemn and holy history of Israel; (2) a moral lethargy that exposed itself to every temptation; (3) a spiritual debasement that preferred personal ease to religious discipline.—People who can be content with a calf for a god may well be content with a rebel for a king.—The perversion of religious feeling carries with it the perversion of all other feeling.—As worship is debased, patriotism is enfeebled.

"And he set, the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made Levites of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi" (vv. 29–31).

Jereboam's power of management comes out here; he excelled in organisation. The calves were set up at opposite ends of the kingdom. Note the lessons: (1) Clever management of religious affairs is no proof of personal piety or godliness. (2) There is a temptation when religion is taken under imperial patronage or direction to subordinate the religious to the political —Jeroboam said in effect, "I must take care of the kingdom whatever comes of the Church: the king first, and God afterwards."

(3) How possible it is to make people believe that holy places make holy deeds. Herein see the cunning of Jeroboam. Bethel and Dan were both sacred places; the one, Bethel, would touch the sentiment of the southerns; the other, Dan, would touch the sentiment of the dwellers in northern Palestine. (About Bethel see Gen. xxviii. 11-19, Gen. xxxv. 9-15, 1 Sam. vii. 16. About Dan see Judges xviii. 30, 31.) (4) Observe that when impious kings venture to make priests they make convenient tools for themselves. They are afraid of high intelligence, noble character, divine inspiration, and daring power.—They want their own servants, not God's.—The true ministry is called of heaven.—If Jeroboam first offered the office to the Levites and they refused it, their refusal was a proof of their divine election.—The expression "made priests of the lowest of the people" means literally "from the ends of the people," equal to "from all ranks of the people."

"So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar and burnt incense" (v. 33).

Thus the king himself became a priest: his power of management and scheming is once more brought to bear. He who had managed great imperial works of a material kind was tempted to measure his intellectual sagacity against religious problems. So Jeroboam set up a system of his own. He changed the festival month. Where everything has been appointed and determined by God no change is permissible. Under such circumstances he who would change a date would change a doctrine. God specified for the candlesticks and the snuffers as well as for the mercy seat and the cherubim.—Having brought the office of a priest into contempt, the king sought to make it respectable by assuming it himself,—so we patch our own poor work, and cover our decrepitude with a mantle of gold.

Note.

The leading object of Jeroboam's policy was to widen the breach between the two kingdoms, and to rend asunder those common interests among all the descendants of Jacob, which it was one great object of the law to combine and interlace. To this end he scrupled not to sacrifice the most sacred and inviolable interests and obligations of the covenant people, by

forbidding his subjects to resort to the one temple and altar of Jehovah at Jerusalem, and by establishing shrines at Dan and Bethel—the extremities of his kingdom—where "golden calves" were set up as the symbols of Jehovah, to which the people were enjoined to resort and bring their offerings. The pontificate of the new establishment he united to his crown, in imitation of the Egyptian kings. He was officiating in that capacity at Bethel, offering incense, when a prophet appeared, and in the name of the Lord, announced a coming time, as yet far off, in which a king of the house of David, Josiah by name, should burn upon the unholy altar the bones of its ministers. He was then preparing to verify, by a commissioned prodigy, the truth of the oracle he had delivered, when the king attempted to arrest him, but was smitten with palsy in the arm he stretched forth. At the same moment the threatened prodigy took place, the altar was rent asunder, and the ashes strewed far around. This measure had, however, no abiding effect. The policy on which Jeroboam acted lay too deep in what he deemed the vital interests of his separate kingdom, to be even thus abandoned; and the force of the considerations which determined his conduct may in part be appreciated from the fact that no subsequent king of Israel, however well disposed in other respects, ever ventured to lay a finger on this schismatical establishment. Hence "the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, wherewith he sinned and made Israel to sin," became a standing phrase in describing that iniquity from which no king of Israel departed (1 Kings xii. 25–33; xiii.).

1 Kings xiii.

This chapter opens with a strange incident. A man of God came out of Judah by the express command of God, and when he came to Bethel, behold Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And the man of God having been told what to do cried against the altar and said, "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." And the man of God gave a sign (v. 3) and Jeroboam put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him, but the hand was dried up so that he could not pull it in again to him, and it was only by the prayer of the man of God that the king's hand was healed again.—Learn: (1) God knows all the uses to which his altars are being put; (2) He knows for what purpose we profess his name, or take up our places in his sanctuary; (3) Even kings must be smitten if they defile or degrade the altar; (4) Men of God must speak the word of the Lord whatever consequences may ensue.

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